



## **Senator Harkin sees healthcare bill benefiting rural America**

**By Jon H. Harsch**

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Washington, Dec. 21 – Democratic Senators and the President-elect of the American Medical Association (AMA) said in a press conference Monday that the health reform legislation likely to win Senate approval this week is good news for rural America and other “underserved areas.”

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) said the bill “starts to break down the wall between a class of Americans who can afford to stay healthy and another who cannot.”

Incoming AMA President Dr. Cecil Wilson, a Florida internist, said the bill provides “key benefits for meaningful reform.” He charged that “America has the best health care in the world, if you can get it, but for far too many people, access to care is out of reach because they lack insurance and this is just not acceptable to physicians who provide high-quality care in an often fragmented system that doesn’t work for them or their patients.” Among the benefits, Wilson said, is that the bill “increases payments to primary care physicians and general surgeons in underserved areas.”

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), who gave up chairing the Senate Agriculture Committee to replace the late Sen. Ted Kennedy as Chair of the Senate Health Committee at the center of the healthcare debate, said that “America’s doctors have sized up our broken healthcare system and their prescription for a cure is to pass the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.”

“Specifically with regard to doctors,” Harkin said, “this bill will enhance the doctor/patient relationship in many ways. For example, by cracking down on health insurance company abuses, we are going to reduce the opportunities for corporate bureaucrats to come between the doctor and the doctor’s patient.”

Harkin added that “This bill will significantly increase the number of primary care doctors especially in rural areas and other underserved communities. We do this by greatly expanding the presence of Community Health Centers and increasing investments in the National Health Service Corps. We also create a rural healthcare professional pipeline which gives increased training opportunities to health professionals working in rural areas.”

Following the 60-40 Senate vote early Monday morning making final Senate passage of a health bill likely, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) explained that while Republicans agree on the need for healthcare reform, the process should be deliberative and bipartisan, not rushed and partisan. He said “The result has been just what you'd expect. The final product is a mess and so is the process that's brought us here to vote on a bill that the American people overwhelmingly oppose.”

Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN) warns that “We potentially are getting ready to pass a bill that there's no question in my mind is going to lead to huge deficits down the road.”

Raising eyebrows about his crude choice of words, Republican National Committee Chairman Michael was even more dismissive Monday following the 60-40 vote, saying that he is “tired of the Congress thumbing their nose and flipping a bird to the American people.”

For full coverage of the Senate's healthcare vote Monday, go to: [www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091221S4.pdf](http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091221S4.pdf).

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