

Final Senate healthcare vote set for 8 AM Thursday, Christmas Eve

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Washington, Dec. 22 – In a partial concession to senators and staff still hoping to get home for Christmas, the Senate Republican leadership – over the objections of several Republicans still trying to find “just one Democrat” to switch his or her vote – decided to allow the final vote on healthcare reform at 8AM Christmas eve rather than 7 PM. That 11-hour, eleventh-hour reprieve may be just enough to allow at least some senators to enjoy their Christmas dinner at home – depending on how serious the forecast Midwestern ice storms turn out to be.

Republicans are correct that if just one Democrat switched in the final procedural vote scheduled for 1 PM Wednesday, a Republican filibuster could block passage of the Democrats’ “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.” That’s because 60 votes – including all 58 Democrats and the two independents, Sens. Joe Lieberman (CT) and Bernie Sanders (VT) – are needed to prevent a Republican filibuster. When and if that final procedural hurdle is overcome, only 50 votes will be needed to pass the bill on Christmas Eve. Accordingly, while Republicans have a fighting chance of finding one vote to prevent a 60-40 vote on Wednesday, they have no hope of having 11 votes switch on Thursday. That fact presumably is the reason why Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said Tuesday morning that he was hopeful of reaching agreement with Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on holding the final vote on Wednesday.



Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV). Photo: Agri-Pulse

As it turned out, the Republicans relented only part-way, moving the final vote up to Thursday morning rather than giving Reid the Wednesday vote he’d hoped to get.

The highly unusual Thursday session will be the first time since 1963 that the Senate has met on Christmas Eve. That last occasion was to finalize foreign aid funding during the Vietnam War.

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