

Sen. Tom Harkin says farmers among ‘biggest winners’ from healthcare reform

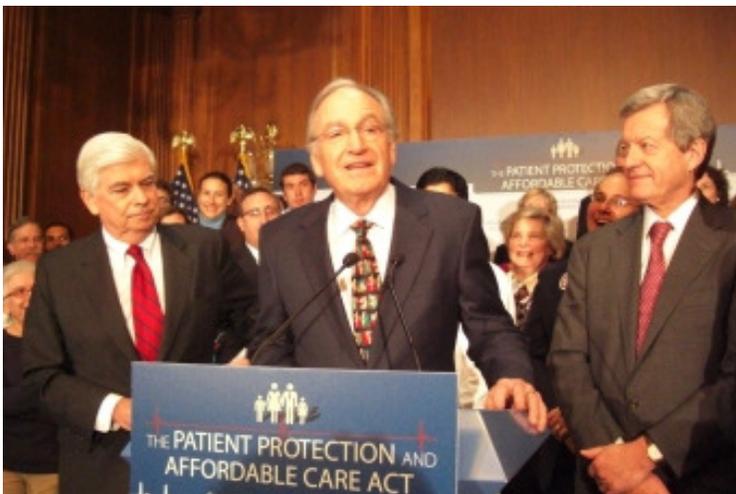
By Jon H. Harsch

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Washington, Dec. 22 – Following a Democratic Party press conference Tuesday celebrating the near certainty that the Senate will pass its healthcare reform legislation on Christmas Eve, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) told *Agri-Pulse* that “Every time I’m working these health care issues, I think of my home town where I’m from in Iowa and how is this going to affect people there.”

Harkin insisted that “The biggest winners in our healthcare bill are small businesses and the self-employed, which is, by definition, farmers. Because they are at the end of the road, they have to take what they can get. Many of them only get one insurance company that will offer them any insurance, so it’s very expensive for farmers and farm families.”

Harkin said that once healthcare reform becomes the law of the land, “the farmers will be in the driver’s seat. They’ll have many more options, they’ll be using the exchanges. As well, small businesses can get subsidies now to be able to buy that insurance.” Harkin said that under the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act,” farmers running their farm as a small business will be entitled to a 35% credit under the legislation, “and it’ll go to 50%.”



Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) flanked by Sens. Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Max Baucus (D-MT). Photo: *Agri-Pulse*.

There was considerable surprise earlier this year when Harkin relinquished the chairmanship of the House Agriculture Committee in order to become Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, succeeding the late Sen. Ted Kennedy. Harkin explained that the health reform legislation was one reason he switched, saying “There’s a lot of stuff

that I wanted to fight for in this bill that really goes to rural America.” Along with making affordable health insurance available to farmers, rural communities and small businesses, he said that “there are a lot of small hospitals which are not small enough to get that extra benefit that low-volume hospitals get, and they’re not big enough to get the discounts that the large hospitals get. They’re called in-between-ers, or ‘tweeners. They’re in about 27 states, with 7 or 8 in Iowa, so I put a provision in there that will get them a better reimbursement, as if they were a big hospital for example. Some people said that’s a special thing I put in there but it’s not just for Iowa. There’re five of these in Kentucky, there’re five in Texas, there’re several in other states, but again, these are all small rural hospitals.”

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#30