



Senate passes health bill 60-39 Christmas Eve - either 'historic' or 'a monstrosity'

By Jon H. Harsch

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Washington, Dec. 24 – After Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) pledged that Republicans “will continue to fight,” at 7:16 AM Christmas Eve, the Senate voted 60 to 39 in a party-line vote to pass the healthcare reform bill, H.R. 3590, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. With Vice President Joe Biden presiding, all 58 Democrats and the Senate’s two Independents voted for the bill while 39 Republicans voted no. One Republican, Sen. Jim Bunning (R-KY), did not vote.

Even as Democrats celebrated what they called a historic victory for the American people, work began on the difficult process of reconciling the Senate health reform bill with the different health bill passed by the House. Democrats hope that a reconciled bill worked out in a House-Senate conference in January will lead to President Obama signing the final bill as early as February.

In a clear signal of bitter partisan feelings over the health bill, House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH) commented after Senate passage Thursday that “Not even Ebenezer Scrooge himself could devise a scheme as cruel and greedy as Democrats’ government takeover of health care.”

Boehner charged that “Senator Reid’s health care bill increases premiums for families and small businesses, raises taxes during a recession, cuts seniors’ Medicare benefits, adds to our skyrocketing debt, and puts bureaucrats in charge of decisions that should be made by patients and doctors. The bill also authorizes taxpayer-funded abortions, violating long-standing federal policy. It’s no coincidence that the more the American people learn about this monstrosity, the more they oppose it.”

In seeming contradiction of Republican’s charges that the Democrats rushed their healthcare bill through without adequate time for Senate consideration, Boehner said that “Democrats have spent the better part of the past seven months focused on this government takeover of health care.” In his own remarks just before Thursday’s vote, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) noted that Democrats have spent the last 65 years in efforts to achieve universal healthcare coverage, ever since President Harry Truman’s “call to action” in 1945.

In contrast to Boehner's dire warnings, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, said the newly passed health bill "will provide the reforms our country so desperately needs." He explained that Thursday's vote "will bring the promise of comprehensive health reform closer to every American. Our legislation has a simple goal: decrease the number of uninsured, increase access to affordable care and make health insurance companies more accountable. In passing it today, we send an important message to Americans that help is on the way – that your insurance company can no longer discriminate against you for a pre-existing condition or based on your gender; if you're a small business owner, you will have more choice and competition in the marketplace, and if you're a senior, you will have the prescription drug coverage you need.

To read Sen. Harkin's list of the healthcare bill's immediate benefits, go to: www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091224H1.pdf

To read the complete text of the Senate healthcare legislation as passed Dec. 24th, go to: <http://democrats.senate.gov>

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