



White House health care forum shows deep divisions remain

By Sara Wyant

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After about seven hours of discussion, President Barack Obama's health care summit on Thursday ended with some of the same deep divisions that have been evident throughout most of the year. Democrats say consumers can't wait for lawmakers to make major changes in the country's health care system and threatened to move ahead without bipartisan support. Republicans say the massive health care bill is out of touch with what the country wants, and that Democrats should throw it out and start over.

President Obama opened the session by asking participants to search for common ground and implored them to "make sure that this discussion is actually a discussion and not just us trading talking points." But talking points and finger-pointed still surfaced, although there were signs that the two parties could agree on certain areas.

Lawmakers agreed that consumers should be allowed to buy insurance across state lines, although Democrats want to set minimum standards for policies in all states. They agreed that forming pools for uninsured people is a good way to lower premium costs. Summit participants also acknowledged that unless soaring health care costs are contained, Medicare will bankrupted and employers will stop offering coverage.

Confused by all of the claims and counterclaims on health care reform?

FactCheck.org has some good explanations. Go to:
<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/02/health-care-summit-squabbles/>

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"Because there is general agreement on the need to curb healthcare costs, to end insurance industry abuses, and improve quality, choice and competition in our health system, it is my hope that the summit will help bridge the remaining differences and advance a reasonable and responsible approach to health care reform," said Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND) in a statement following the meeting.

But most Democrats seemed to unwilling to take a more incremental approach to fix the problems, a game plan advanced by many Republicans

“There are a lot of things that Congress can do to fix health care problems without upending the whole system and hurting the economy,” explained Sen. Chuck Grassley after the Forum. “I’d like to see congressional leaders focus on those areas where there is broad-based agreement, rather than a politically driven agenda on health care that would make things worse, not better.

As he wrapped up the Forum, Obama criticized the GOP for advocating “baby steps” and rejected their call to start over. Americans “don’t want us to wait,” he emphasized. Without any significant movement toward bipartisan cooperation, Obama said Democrats would push ahead on their own and let voters decide who is right.

To move ahead, Democrats could rely on a special budget process known as reconciliation. Under a plan being discussed by senior Democratic lawmakers, the House would approve the bill the Senate passed on Christmas Eve, along with compromise provisions that address their objections to the Senate legislation. To prevent a GOP filibuster, the changes would be written under reconciliation rules.

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