

Senate Finance Committee tackles 564 amendments to Chairman's Mark

This week the Senate Finance Committee begins the process of marking up (amending) the 'Chairman's Mark' on health care reform – the proposal put out by Committee Chairman Senator Max Baucus when his efforts at a bipartisan bill with a 'Gang of Six' collapsed.

It's not clear how much input the other five – Democrat Senators Conrad and Bingaman and Republican Senators Grassley, Enzi and Snowe – have had into the final package, which has been savaged from the right and the left. What we do know is that other Committee members who are recognized as major players in health (Rockefeller and Wyden), were completely excluded from the negotiations.

So in that light it's interesting to look at who offered what in terms of amendments.

- Almost 50% (268) of the amendments are offered by Democrats.
- 102 amendments were offered by the five other senators who make (or made?) up the Gang of Six.
- All the members of the Committee have amendments to the bill; Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) has the most at 47, and Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID) is a co-sponsor with other Republicans on just four amendments.
- Democrat Senators recognized as key in health care, Jay Rockefeller (WV) and Ron Wyden (OR) have 45 and 29 amendments respectively.

As always, these amendments run the gamut from far-reaching and thoughtful to provocative, predictable, and, dare we say it, simply out-of-touch (in most cases so out-of-touch that they will be ruled non-germane to the bill).

It's easy to tell where many of these members get their financial campaign support from on the basis of the amendments they are sponsoring. There are a depressing number of Senators simultaneously offering amendments to limit health insurance cover or help with out-of-pocket costs for low-income families and amendments that protect health insurance companies and pharmaceutical and device manufacturers. At least 16 Republican amendments are about protecting doctors from medical liability costs.

The Center for Responsive Politics has looked at recent donations to the members of the Senate Finance Committee from health lobbyists. The three Democrats and three Republicans who make up the Gang of Six have each received an average of \$74,600 in the first half of this year. This is about 25% more than the average of \$59,600 in such donations that the other members of the Committee have received from the

Menzies Centre ^{for} Health Policy



The University of Sydney

pharmaceutical, hospital, insurance and nursing home industries. However most of this is because of the high rate of donations to Senator Grassley, the Republican ranking member (\$223,600) and the Chairman, Senator Baucus (\$141,000). Senator Snowe received only received \$9,000 and Senator Bingaman only \$5,000.

The White House has been really going to bat for health care reform. Yesterday, President Obama appeared on five Sunday morning talk shows fielding questions that predominantly focused on health care. First Lady Michelle Obama is weighing in on the issue by focusing on how health care can affect families and women. This week the President is busy at the UN and the G20, but Vice President will wade deep into the debate, giving what is being billed as his first major health policy address on Tuesday to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners and visiting a retirement community to tell seniors that reform would not affect them adversely.

Biden will also be reaching out to lawmakers to press the case for health care reform. In addition to fellow Democrats, Biden plans to court Republicans in the hunt for health-care votes. His list of GOP targets will include the two senators from Maine, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, as well as Senators George Voinovich (OH) and Richard Lugar (IN).