

A Big Day in Washington for Health Care Reform

This morning on the front steps of the Capitol House Leader Nancy Pelosi, accompanied by some 100 Democratic Members of Congress and a number of citizens who told their health care stories, launched HR 3962, *The Affordable Health Care for America Act*, 2009 – the merged House health care reform bill.

Pelosi and her colleagues were obviously pretty elated with their work. And realistically, they can afford to be. In a call to think tanks and stakeholder groups who have worked with the Democrats on developing this legislation, Pelosi made these points about the bill:

- It is affordable for the middle class (more help to purchase health cover; more choice with a public health option; surcharge only on the top 0.3% of earners);
- It offers security for seniors (fills in the donut hole in Medicare part D quicker);
- It is responsible towards future generations (comes in under budget, costing \$900 billion / 10 years, and does not add to the deficit).

The bill differs from the predicted Senate bill primarily by covering 8 million more people, albeit at a slightly higher cost.

What Pelosi didn't volunteer was that the bill now only funds the provisions for prevention and wellness and public health (originally funded at \$89 billion / 10 years) at \$34 billion / 5 years. I assume the plan is to come back in later years to authorize further funds for this important refocusing of health care services.

The bill, which is up on the web (http://docs.house.gov/rules/health/111_ahcaa.pdf), will be available for public scrutiny for 72 hours. At that point, on Monday morning, the House managers expect to introduce an amended version, incorporating further changes, which will need to be available for a further 72 hours. So the bill could be on the House floor for a vote as soon as Thursday next week.

Meanwhile the Republicans struggle on. Yesterday, House Minority Leader John Boehner and House Republican Conference Chairman Mike Pence (R-IN) held a press conference to explain why progressive health reform would hurt seniors and to highlight the GOP's "better solutions." Boehner instructed readers to go to the GOP healthcare website "and you can see all of our proposals", but seniors are not addressed in any of the plans presented. In fact, there are no occurrences of the words "senior," "elderly," or

“older Americans” at all. An archived version of the website can be found here (<http://thinkprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/091028-gop-healthcare-website.pdf>).

Republicans have been insisting for months that Democrats are shoving a secret bill down the throats of the American public. The health reform legislation “should be posted online for 72 hours so members and the American people get a chance to see what’s in these bills,” Boehner told Fox News. At a press conference this morning, a reporter turned the tables on Boehner and asked whether he’d post the GOP plan for 72 hours. Boehner declined to make such a pledge. Presumably the Republicans won’t post the GOP plan because there isn’t one. As Boehner said later in the press conference: “..... it’s pretty difficult for us to have a solid plan”.

There are currently just nine weeks left in which to get a health care bill to the President’s desk for his signature before Christmas. It should be a busy time for the Democrats. I guess the Republicans can recycle their same old speeches and take it easy.