

Published in the Greenwood Villager
January 7, 2010

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Early on the morning of December 24th, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and more than a dozen Democrat senators exchanged holiday gifts in the form of a vote on the Senate version of health care reform, H.R. 3590. Harry Reid received the gift of 60 votes, the number he needed, to pass the Democrats' health care bill in the Senate. In return for their support, more than a dozen Senators received multi-million dollar sweetheart deals at the American taxpayer's expense.

In the days leading up to the Christmas Eve vote, headlines from newspapers across the country slammed the final Senate health care bill and the stomach-turning vote buying tactics Harry Reid was using. Those headlines highlighted deals including the \$100 million "Cornhusker Kickback" for Nebraska negotiated by Sen. Ben Nelson, giving the state a free pass from having to pay any costs related to Medicaid expansion in exchange for his support.

This particular deal has also raised significant questions of the bill's constitutionality. As Colorado Attorney General John Suthers pointed out in a recent Denver Post column, "The U.S. Constitution and related case law bar Congress from arbitrarily funding or taxing the states differently. Any differences must have a rational basis."

To Suthers, and more than a dozen other attorney generals around the country who are insisting the provision be removed – the Cornhusker Kickback has no rational basis and the bill may be unconstitutional.

Special deals cut by Democrat Senators with Harry Reid also included the much maligned “Louisiana Purchase” giving Louisiana an estimated \$300 million in extra Medicaid funding, Vermont received \$600 million in additional Medicaid funding, and Connecticut received a \$100 million dollar earmark for a university hospital nicknamed the “U Con” thanks to Sen. Chris Dodd. Unsettlingly, we still do not know the full extent of how many giveaways and how much pork was put in to the Senate bill at the 11th hour.

However, we do know the Senate bill passed on Christmas Eve and the billions of dollars in sweetheart deals it included is a far cry from the cost cutting, deficit-reducing legislation Democrats have been promising the American people.

In defending the bill, Harry Reid was quoted saying the legislation is no different than any other measure that includes funding for pet-projects. I see it as even worse. Funding for wasteful pet projects is bad enough, but these Christmas Eve presents include carve-outs and exemptions for entire states to the tune of billions of dollars.

If the Senate provisions are included in the final measure as anticipated, not only will Coloradans have to pay taxes to cover their share of new federal mandates, but we’ll be paying for Nebraska’s too. This provision and the rest of the last minute vote-buying pork should be stripped from any final bill and I certainly won’t vote for a bill that includes it.

Since my arrival in Washington last January, I’ve strongly maintained that our health care system is in desperate need of reform. I’ve heard it from my constituents and experienced it firsthand. I have also argued vigorously that we need market-based solutions that focus on reducing both the cost of care and cost to the consumer, while maintaining the doctor patient relationship. Plainly, neither the Senate passed nor the House passed versions of the bill will reduce spending and both bills will increase the cost of health care for individuals. It is also telling that Democrats cannot clearly explain how the legislation will reduce spending and cut costs. The Senate vote was a win for Harry Reid and his liberal agenda but it was a loss for the American taxpayer.

So what comes next?

Where things currently stand, the Democrats in control in the House or the Senate, or both, will have to make major compromises and many members of the Democrat caucus are unhappy with the options their leadership is providing them. While the process is nearing its final hurdles and a final vote could come later this month, significant differences remain in the two bills. I firmly believe both versions of the health care bill miss the mark of true reform and are full of special-interest giveaways, new federal mandates, and crippling new taxes.

So long as this legislation continues to address our nation's health care woes through more government control and more spending, I will oppose it and keep fighting for common sense solutions.