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Will Blue Dogs Bark on Proposed Government-Run Health Care?

Posted by Kevin Boland on June 10th, 2009

Last week, the Blue Dog Democrats in the House [released](#) a statement of principles on what kind of health care reform they would support, stating that: "We are concerned...about a 'Medicare-like' public option and its ability to achieve all of the benefits put forth by its proponents." Speaking for more than 50 Members of the House, the Blue Dog Coalition could play a pivotal role in the health care debate.

Rep. Mike Ross, the chairman of the Blue Dog Democrats' "Health Care Task Force," has [slammed](#) the proposed "public option" - Washington-speak for government-run health care - saying that: "We cannot create a public option that stacks the deck against a system that currently provides coverage to more than 160 million Americans." And the [Washington Post](#) quoted fellow Blue Dog Democrat Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN), who said "the draft by Kennedy aides and other ideas circulating among party leaders are unrealistically generous, while an employer mandate hurts workers and consumers. 'Congress just doesn't get it,' he said."

However, Democratic leaders in the House of Representatives are laying down the law, stating that government-run health care isn't negotiable. As [Roll Call](#) reported: "There won't be any consideration of the trigger,' Ways and Means Chairman Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.) said. 'We're going to have a public plan and we're not going to wait two, three, five years to see what happens and then trigger it. We're going to have a plan.'" Liberals counter that the public plan would be a "choice" - though, as the [Lewin Group](#) has found, it would be more like an "offer you can't refuse," since over 100 million Americans would lose their private insurance.

In an op-ed published yesterday on [Townhall.com](#), House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH) said that: "it is evident that the forthcoming plan from Democratic leaders will make health care more expensive, limit treatments and ration care, and put bureaucrats in charge of medical decisions rather than patients and doctors." Leader Boehner called the Democrats' proposed "public option" a nothing more than "a government takeover of health care."

And Michael Tanner, a fellow at the Cato Institute, noted on Monday in an op-ed published in [Roll Call](#) that: "First, universal health insurance does not mean universal access to health care" since at any given time, "750,000 Britons are waiting for admission to National Health Service hospitals, and shortages force the NHS to cancel as many as 50,000 operations each year. In Canada, more than 800,000 patients are on waiting lists for medical procedures...many of these individuals suffer chronic pain and that some die awaiting treatment."

Blue Dogs like to position themselves as fiscal conservatives and moderate Democrats. So far this Congress, they have refused to buck their party's leaders on the \$1 trillion "stimulus," the \$410 billion omnibus spending bill, and the \$3.6 trillion budget that will triple the debt in ten years. As a [McClatchy](#) story noted last month, "So far...it's debatable how much sway the Democratic centrists have had."

Since many of their members represent conservative districts, the question is: will Blue Dog Democrats finally bark and oppose Speaker Pelosi's government-run health care plan? Or will they join House Republicans in making health care more accessible and affordable without giving middle-class families and small businesses the short end of the stick?

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