

[Click to Print](#)[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Politics

[\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)

Senate Dems put aspects of health care bill at risk

By: [Susan Ferrechio](#)**Chief Congressional Correspondent****06/18/09 7:34 PM EDT**

With a White House-imposed deadline looming for Congress to pass health care reform and no sign of a deal, Republicans could significantly weaken a final bill by using a decades-old rule written by the chamber's most senior Democrat.

Democrats have considered using a procedural option reserved for simple budgetary legislation to pass health care legislation with a simple majority, rather than the 60 votes typically required.

But if they use that option, known as budget reconciliation, the chamber's 41 Republicans may still be able to block crucial components.

"There is a concern that a lot of the parts of the bill will fall by the wayside if we have to move it by reconciliation," Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, told The Examiner.

The rule, written by Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., would reinstate the 60-vote requirement on provisions in the health care bill if they add to the deficit or if the Senate parliamentarian decides parts of the legislation are there to create policy, not to affect the budget. The Democrats control 59 of the Senate's 100 seats.

"If Democrats decide to go down the reconciliation route, some of the bill will pass and some of it won't," said former Senate parliamentarian Robert Dove. "It will be a Swiss cheese bill, but it will be a bill."

Dove, who worked as a Senate parliamentarian from 1966 until 2001, authored the rule at the request of Byrd.

"How does anyone know whether something is there for budget purposes, rather than policy purposes?" Dove asked.

The Democratic health care proposal can be blocked if lawmakers cannot bring down the Congressional Budget Office's cost assessments of their proposals so far, ranging from \$1 trillion to \$1.6 trillion. Some senators have even proposed creating their own cost analysis, or using one from the White House, but Dove said that tactic won't work.

"The only score that matters is the CBO," Dove said.

Senate Republicans, and perhaps a few centrist Democrats, are sure to invoke the Byrd Rule, and for that reason, Democrats who are negotiating the health care bill are trying desperately to avoid the reconciliation route by amassing 60 votes.

Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., the top negotiator on a bipartisan bill, told The Examiner his goal is to move a bill “without reconciliation, clearly.”

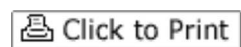
Baucus said despite the lack of consensus between Democrats and Republicans on whether to include a government-run insurance provider or to tax health care benefits, “there are a lot of Republicans who want to support this bill.”

But health care policy experts question whether the two parties will ever find sufficient consensus to move forward with enough Republicans to avoid the reconciliation route.

“This is not trying to split the difference on an appropriations bill,” said Mike Tanner, a health care policy expert at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. “You can’t fundamentally bridge halfway between some of these differences.”

Find this article at:

http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/politics/Senate-Dems-put-aspects-of-health-care-bill-at-risk_06_19-48559937.html



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.