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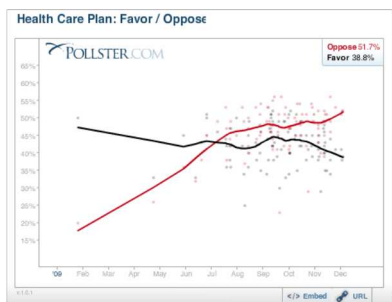
ASYMMETRICAL INFORMATION

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Do Americans Want Health Care Reform, or Not?

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Polled support for the health care plan wending its way through Congress continues to crash downward in the polls. And before you say it, it's not just Rasmussen, which has actually been pretty much in the middle of the other polls. Here's where we stand as of today:

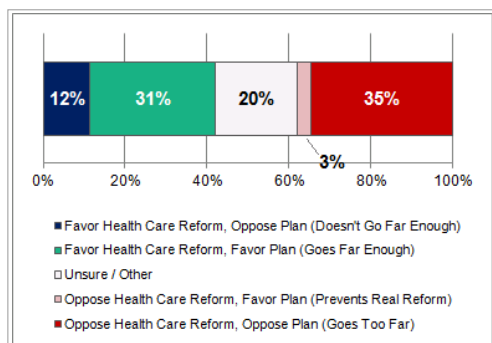


For reform advocates, this is not good news. At 40% approval, it probably passes. At 30% approval—what Social Security reform enjoyed by the time it imploded—it's not going to no matter how the Senate massages their plan. Democrats cannot pass a bill this large on a straight party line vote if the *only* people in the country who want it are Democrats. Where is the line crossed between "probably will" and "probably won't"? In September, a seasoned political reporter told me that the numbers could not go "much lower" before Democrats were forced to abandon the bill. Well, it's lower—and the disapproval is spiking.

The silver lining in this for reform advocates over the last few days has been Nate Silver's argument that a significant portion of the opposition to the plan was coming from the left:

Ipsos also asked a parallel question of people who supported the plan: did any of them support the plan because they *oppose* health care reform and thought that the plan was sufficiently watered-down so as to "keep health care reform from happening"? A small number of people picked this response: about 10 percent of those in favor of the plan, or 3 percent of the entire sample.

Combining these numbers together, we get the following:



One way to look at this: 43 percent of people favor health care reform, whereas 38 percent oppose it (20 percent are undecided). But the actual plan under consideration gets numbers that are more or less the reverse of that -- 34 percent in favor, 46 percent opposed -- because a significant number of people think the plan *doesn't go far enough*.

I thought about blogging it but ultimately I wasn't sure how seriously to take it. For one thing

even if Nate's right, that poll still seems to be telling you that you've lost the 12%--whatever the reason they don't like the plan, they aren't coming out for you next November whichever way you vote. The people who oppose the plan might, if you don't vote for it. Since that number is bigger than the number who favor it in Nate's chart, the political calculus is still fraught.

But the bigger problem is that Nate classified everyone opposing reform because it doesn't go far enough as opposing it from the left. Undoubtedly, that's true of many, even most, of those respondents. But I could go down to Cato right now and poll 65% support for the proposition that the health care reform doesn't go far enough--in the direction of taking away the employer health care tax exemption, means testing Medicare, and other ideas that no one would call "left". Republicans who want liability caps and bigger HSAs might have similar complaints.

A new poll out from PPP may shed some light on the issue. They're a Democratic-affiliated outfit, so they can hardly be accused of stacking the polls. Their poll, like everyone else's, shows support in a continued, slow collapse. In September, they polled it at 45% for and 46% against, while the latest poll says 39% for, 52% against. More interestingly, they asked a variant of the question Nate examined, and got very different results:

Are you opposed because it gets government too involved in health care or because it would not involve government enough?

Too much government involvement: 90%

Not enough government involvement: 6%

Not sure: 4%

All the polls I've seen show that the independents are already heavily in the "against" camp, and steadily moving further in that direction. I don't see this rallying many troops to the Congressional front lines.