



Politics

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



Long-awaited compromise health bill produces more discord

By: [Susan Ferrechio](#)
Chief Congressional Correspondent
September 17, 2009

The Senate Finance Committee has raised the curtain on what was supposed to be bipartisan health care legislation. But rather than bridging the growing divide in Congress, the new proposal has increased discord.

Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., unveiled the "America's Healthy Future Act," which he said would cost \$856 billion over 10 years. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said the cost would be \$774 billion. The \$82 billion discrepancy between the estimates comes from using different calculations, including the depth of cuts to existing programs and revenue the government would take in under Baucus' proposal.

"This is a good bill," Baucus said. "This is a balanced bill. It can pass the Senate."

But after more than 100 hours of meetings with Republicans and making concessions such as dropping government-run public health insurance, not one GOP member of the bipartisan "Gang of Six" that worked on the bill has agreed to back the plan, although Sens. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., said they would keep negotiating the bill but complained about its cost and potential to eliminate some kinds of Medicare coverage.

And Democrats in both the House and Senate are critical of the bill, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who favors a public

Senate finance bill by the numbers

The Congressional Budget Office provided a breakdown on how a proposed compromise bill. The plan would provide subsidized coverage for poor people and require everyone else be covered or pay fines. A look at projected costs over the next decade:

- » **Total cost: \$774 billion**
- » **Coverage: 94 percent of all Americans under 65, excluding illegal immigrants -- an 11 percent increase**
- » **Medicaid expansion: The number of**

option.

The bill would increase health care coverage by expanding Medicare to anyone earning under 133 percent of the poverty level -- \$24,352 for a family of three. It would require individuals above that level to buy coverage or face graduated fines ranging from \$750 to \$3,800.

While the bill does not require businesses to provide coverage, companies with more than 50 workers that do not offer coverage would owe the government \$400 for each employee who gets a tax credit for health insurance.

And it would slap a 35 percent excise tax on health insurance companies that offer health care plans worth more than \$8,000 for individuals and \$21,000 for families.

Such a tax has already garnered opposition from Senate Democrats at both ends of the political spectrum. Sen Ben Nelson, D-Neb. said he would oppose the tax, as would Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., who said it would cost every coal miner in his state.

And despite every effort by Baucus to avoid the partisan label, that is just what House Republicans are calling his legislation.

"It cuts Medicare for seniors, imposes new taxes on struggling middle-class families and small businesses and has a trillion-dollar price tag," House Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, said.

Senate Democratic leaders still hope to bring a bill to the floor by the end of the year that can be passed with 60 votes, or else pass it with 51 votes using a process that could substantially weaken the bill.

"I don't see them getting 60 votes," said Mike Tanner, a health care scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute. "I'm not sure they have 50 votes at this point."

sferrechio@washingtonexaminer.com

participants in the insurance program for poor Americans, funded by state and federal taxpayers, would increase from about 50 million to 61 million

» **Cost of new entitlements: \$147 billion per year by 2019 for expanded Medicaid and individual and employer subsidies**

» **New taxes: \$215 billion on insurance plans, \$198 billion from other sources, including taxes on drug makers and hospitals**

» **New business for insurance companies: 25 million Americans would be forced to purchase care**

» **Cuts: \$274 billion from Medicare and other programs**

Find this article at:

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/politics/59473047.html>

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