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## Why the rush?

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Last week, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) announced that he was working on yet another version of health reform, incorporating tweaks such as a huge expansion of Medicare, a brand-new version of the so-called "public option" based on the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program plus a possible increase in Medicaid eligibility.

Reid's latest vision not only hasn't been debated or scored by the Congressional Budget Office, no one except Sen. Reid even knows for certain what's in it. Even so, Sen. Reid says the Senate must vote on this new package before Christmas.

In, fact Reid promises he'll do "whatever it takes to get this bill past the Senate in December." His chief lieutenant, Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), who admits that he's "in the dark" about what's in Reid's plan, nevertheless says the proposal "must" pass this year: "We have to do it." President Obama insists that he expects a bill to pass next week.

This is truly extraordinary. The Senate spent four weeks debating the last farm bill and eight weeks debating an energy bill during the last session. But now a 2,000-page bill that will put the government in charge of one-sixth of the US economy (and some of the most important, personal and private decisions in people's lives) must be debated and voted on in just three weeks.

Why?

After all, even if the bill passed tomorrow, most of its provisions wouldn't take effect for many years. The exchanges, designed to make it simpler for people to purchase insurance; subsidies; insurance reforms, such as a ban on excluding pre-existing conditions -- none of it would start until 2014. And, for all the agonizing over the government-run public option, no one would be able to sign up for it for the next five years.

There's no policy reason to hurry -- and many reasons to take it just a bit slower. After all, if we get health reform wrong, American businesses, workers, doctors and patients will be paying the price for a very long time.

Perhaps, then, what's really driving this haste isn't policy, but a desire to force a vote before members of Congress go home and face their constituents.

The *last* time we heard about the need to rush health reform through before some arbitrary deadline was just before the August recess. And when lawmakers did go home for that break, they met a wave of protest and criticism that turned routine town-hall meetings into trials by ordeal. Over Christmas, they can expect the same thing.

The latest polls all say the same thing: CNN shows an overwhelming majority of Americans, 61 percent, oppose the current reform bill, with barely 36 percent supporting it. Rasmussen shows a majority against it, 51-38 (and 40 percent strongly oppose the plan, while just 23 percent are strongly in favor).

Gallup shows 49 percent against, 44 percent for; Ipsos/McClatchey has voters opposed by 46-34. CBS news has it closer - - but with voters still opposed by 45-40.

Not a single major poll shows voters supporting current reform proposals.

And the numbers are worse in states with wavering and vulnerable incumbents: In Sen. Blanche Lincoln's Arkansas, 56 percent of voters strongly oppose the bill; just 18 percent strongly support it. In Mary Landrieu's Louisiana, voters oppose it 55-36; In Ben Nelson's Nebraska, it's 63-29 against.

Even in Reid's home state, a Las Vegas Review Journal poll finds 53 percent of Nevadans opposed, with only 39 percent supporting the bill.

If lawmakers stay in the congressional cocoon, surrounded by lobbyists and special interests, with the leadership always available to twist arms, a vote in favor of this massive \$2.5 trillion government takeover looks much easier. But if they must face voters outraged at the bill's cost, tax hikes and interference in personal medical decisions, senators may be inclined to rethink how to reform health care.

Which is good reason for Congress to slow this train down.

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