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Arena Digest: The Reid gambit

By: **Politico Staff**

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The Reid gambit: Health care 'holy war'?

Mark Mellman, Democratic strategist

“Why Republicans would want to go to war to protect the ability of rapacious insurance companies to take away coverage from those who get sick or old is beyond me. The Senate bill protects patients, holds down costs, creates competition, increases choice, improves preventive care, expands coverage and reduces the deficit — all without raising taxes on those who make less than \$250,000 a year. It’s a bill that finally puts patients in control of their health care, and both parties should be celebrating. Instead, Republicans are apparently offering themselves up to insurance companies as mercenaries, fighting the industries’ war against America’s middle class.”

Michael Kazin, professor, Georgetown University

“A clear snapshot of a dysfunctional political system: Democrats in the Senate propose a bill that may actually save money but will still leave the U.S. as the only industrial nation without universal health insurance — despite our bloated and wasteful system. And every single member of the opposition party will vote against it, many calling it ‘socialist.’ One leading Republican, who was a good friend of Ted Kennedy’s, vows to wage jihad to stop it. Whether health care reform is passed or defeated, the GOP has insured the continuation of fierce polarization in American politics for at least the next two election cycles — and perhaps several more.”

Dana Perino, former White House press secretary

“Make no mistake: Voting to proceed to this bill, especially in the absence of a full [Congressional Budget Office] score, is a vote for the bill. This is the vote that matters and the vote America should consider when evaluating their senators’ decision. This is not a drill. Repeat: This is not a drill. Once the Senate is on the bill, since the Democrats have 60 votes, there’s not going to be an opportunity to change the core provisions.”

James P. Pinkerton, fellow, New America Foundation

“Holy war? Probably. Word war? You betcha. The folks at Americans for Tax Reform have helpfully counted up the number of times that the word ‘tax’ appears in the Reid bill: 183. Other buzz-kill words: ‘taxable’ (164), ‘taxes’ (17), ‘fee’ (152) and ‘penalty’ (115).

“But the real killer word is the R-word — ‘rationing.’ The fiasco over those breast-screening guidelines, which the White House rescinded after just days of withering criticism, is a harbinger of things to come. As Rep. Marsha Blackburn was quoted as saying in Thursday’s Washington Post, ‘This is how rationing begins. ... This is when you start getting a bureaucrat between you and your physician.’

“And so we come to the M-word — ‘more.’ As Samuel Gompers could have explained, the American people want more health care, not less.”

Darrell M. West, vice president, governance studies, Brookings Institution

“This is no holy war. It is old-fashioned politics where Republicans require supermajority votes to move any legislation. Our Founders did not require 60 percent majorities for legislative enactments. If that becomes the new standard in American politics, we are never going to address any policy issue, domestic or foreign.”

Michael F. Cannon, director of health policy studies, Cato Institute

“Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has finally unveiled his massive 2,074-page health care bill. The Congressional Budget Office [says] insurance-expansion provisions would cost the feds \$849 billion over 10 years. To raise those funds, the bill would tax wages, medical devices, prescription drugs, sick people, health insurance premiums (twice), HSAs, FSAs, HRAs and — why not? — cosmetic surgery. The remainder would supposedly come from \$491 billion in Medicare cuts, even though Medicare’s chief actuary says [that is] ‘unrealistic’ and ‘doubtful.’ But don’t worry. ... This thing’s going to reduce the deficit.”

Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.), chairwoman of the House Pro-Choice Caucus

“The Senate version is closer to the Energy and Commerce version in the House, which preserved current law. To me, that was the compromise that we negotiated in committee. I think it’s a fair compromise. I don’t love the language, because it basically applies the Hyde amendment to this bill, and the Pro-Choice Caucus doesn’t think this is a bill about abortion.

“The first thing we have to do is to make sure the Stupak amendment is not added as an amendment in the Senate and that any language included in the conference report is free of it. Overall, though, I think that the health care bill is moving along quite well. We’re eager to see the timing of when the Senate bill goes to conference, as we’d like to move as quickly as possible on health care and move on to job creation.”

Timothy Stoltzfus Jost, professor, Washington and Lee University

“It certainly will be, and it is a sad commentary on what has become ‘holy’ to the Republicans. I am still reading through the bill, but it is a tepid and conservative bill, the minimum that can be done to extend health care to uninsured Americans. It is pathetic that the cause of denying health care to lower and middle-income Americans has become a ‘holy’ cause to Republicans. Republicans of the past, who pushed for legislation much like this to provide subsidies for lower-income Americans to purchase private health insurance, would be embarrassed.”

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