

## EDITORIALS

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### Using reconciliation would hurt Democrats

Choking off debate is no way to muscle through health legislation

Advertiser

DEMOCRATS face widespread public opposition to their health legislation - 2,500 pages long, and costing \$2.5 trillion over 10 years. And the loss of the late Sen. Ted Kennedy's Senate seat cost the party the 60-seat supermajority that enables parties to cut off debate in the U.S. Senate.

Democratic leaders in the House and Senate nevertheless vow to pass a health care bill by corrupting their own procedures if need be. Using the process of "reconciliation," which limits debate to 20 hours, Democrats could impose their health care scheme on the nation with only 51 votes in the Senate.

Members of the House would be asked to pass the Senate bill, which differs greatly from their own. Then the Senate, using reconciliation, would pass a package of changes to appease House Democrats.

Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., is author of the Byrd rule, which since 1985 has limited the use of reconciliation. As senior fellow Michael D. Tanner of the Cato Institute recently reminded, Byrd once explained: "Reconciliation was intended to adjust revenue and spending levels in order to reduce deficits . . . It was not designed to . . . restructure the entire health care system."

Byrd warned that using reconciliation to enact a huge health care package would "violate the intent and spirit of the budget process, and do serious injury to the constitutional role of the Senate."

Reconciliation has been used by both parties since 1974 to, in Tanner's words, "make it easier for Congress to adjust taxes and spending in order to 'reconcile' actual revenues and expenditures with a previously approved budget resolution."

But clearly, liberal Democrats' health care bill is not a budget adjustment. It's a gigantic piece of

- social legislation that would impose government control on a fifth of the U.S. economy.

The New York Times reports that some Democrats who once opposed the use of reconciliation with such far-reaching legislation may not be opposed now. Sen. Jay Rockefeller IV, D-W.Va., was counted in that number.

And where does West Virginia's senior senator stand now?

"Mr. Byrd," wrote the Times, is not opposed - " 'if it's done right,' a spokesman said."

Sad.

Using a power play is not the right way to pass a huge, expensive and far-reaching health care bill. It's a corruption not only of Senate procedures, but also an act of disrespect to the American people, who have a right to the protection debate provides.