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WASHINGTON — In congressional parlance, it is known as a pass.

That's when a member of Congress bucks their own, yet receives no political retribution from colleagues. In Saturday's historic House vote approving a health-care bill, 40 members voted against their party, including two from Louisiana.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Charles "Charlie" Melancon, of Napoleonville, was one of 39 Democrats who joined Republicans opposing the legislation.

More surprising was the lone Republican vote cast by U.S. Rep. Anh "Joseph" Cao, of New Orleans, who made national news with his defection in favor of the bill.

Melancon and Cao are likely to get passes due to their political situations.

Melancon is running to unseat Republican U.S. Sen. David Vitter, while Cao is trying to get re-elected in a district that is two-thirds Democrats.

"Them bucking their party is a pre-requisite to political viability," said Dave Wasserman, who monitors the House for The Cook Political Report in Washington. "It's clear these two representatives voted for their districts over their party."

Neither man wavered on their decision. Cao issued a statement within minutes of the vote indicating why he supported the measure. The former Jesuit seminarian pointed to language inserted into the bill during the debate that bars publicly subsidized health-care plans from offering elective abortions.

Cao was also lobbied heavily by the Obama administration, even receiving a call from the president himself on Saturday. Cao said he gained commitments from Obama to address matters that include a plan to reduce the federal share of Medicaid to the state.

The president also agreed to look into community disaster loan forgiveness for communities hurt by Hurricane Katrina as well as the federal wrangling over the replacement of Charity and Methodist hospitals, Cao said.

Cao, who is considered the most vulnerable member of the House because his district is two-thirds Democratic and black, is acknowledging the vote could be his death knell among fellow Republicans.

"I have always said that I would put aside partisan wrangling to do the business of the people," Cao said in his statement.

Melancon's vote was less unexpected since he voted against the bill when it was before the House Energy and Commerce Committee that he sits on. Melancon said his vote had less to do with his chances in running for the Senate seat in a state where the bill is unpopular than it was adequately representing his district.