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The Big Question: Will Congress pass health reform by year's end?

By Sydelle Moore - 12/17/09 01:15 PM ET

Some of the nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer some insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today.

Today's question:

Will the Senate pass a healthcare reform bill before it adjourns for the year?

Peter Navarro, professor of Economics and Public Policy at U.C. Irvine, said:

A majority of Americans want more and cheaper healthcare but this watered-down bill doesn't accomplish those goals, and its financing is punitive.

The optimal Dem strategy is to remain principled and let the Reps kill the bill. This would limit the damages this unpopular bill is going to cause the Dems in the upcoming midterm elections.

The optimal Republican strategy is to fight the bill tooth and nail and let the Dems steadily give away their principles and then jam an awful bill down the Reps' throats. So far Harry Reid is playing right into the Reps' hands and seems poised to give a real stocking stuffer to the Reps with Senate passage.

Nonetheless, the situation remains fluid. If Reid finally sees the chessboard, the bill will die, and the Senate can move on the real electoral issue — firing Bernanke and fixing the economy.

Michael F. Cannon, Director of Health Policy Studies at the [Cato Institute](#), said:

It's not looking good — nor should it.

The Reid bill becomes [less popular](#) with each passing day. (So too does [President Obama's handling of healthcare](#).)

CBS News is reporting that Reid wants to hold a vote before Christmas because [he doesn't want senators to go home and hear from their constituents](#).

Reid has been [systematically suppressing a complete cost estimate](#) of his bill.

Reid's manager's amendment will make unknown, countless, and dramatic changes to that 2,074-page

bill — and Reid wants to vote on it before anyone knows what those changes are.

Even Max Baucus admits that [not a single senator understands the Reid bill](#).

Our federalist system, the separation of powers, our bicameral national legislature, six-year terms for senators, staggered Senate elections, and the Senate's procedural rules all exist precisely to prevent what Reid is trying to do: ram a sweeping piece of legislation through Congress without due consideration.

Richard Lindzen, atmospheric physicist and professor at MIT, said:

It seems unlikely. The consequence will likely be a well-disguised sigh of relief on the part of the Democrats.

Michelle Bernard, president of [Independent Women's Forum](#), said:

The Senate Will Probably Pass Something, Who Knows What

Many Democrats seem willing to do anything to pass a health care bill before Christmas— they are busy rewriting portions of this two thousand page bill, dropping in millions of dollars of giveaways to wavering Senators, anything that will cobble together 60 votes for something they can call health care reform. Few Senators know what exactly is in the legislation, let alone what its long term effects will be and how new measures will interact with what's left of the system that's currently in place. That doesn't seem to matter anymore. The process should appall everyone, regardless of their views on health care.

But given that Democrats seem willing to do and accept anything to pass a bill, the safe bet is that something will pass before the year's end.

If it doesn't, the prospects for passing a bill will dim: Senators returning home will hear from angry constituents and Members facing re-election next year will see how quickly judgment day from voters approaches. As a result, President Obama and Congressional leadership will have a tough time advancing their agenda. The President has gone all in on this health care debate. If he doesn't get a win on this one, his fellow Democrats will simply start focusing on their own survival.

John F. McManus, president of The John Birch Society, said:

At those times when a petitioner might actually be worthy, prayers do get answered. Passage of a healthcare bill by the end of 2009 looks increasingly unlikely. This is an answer to prayer. No one should believe, however, that the socialists pushing for government takeover of America's exemplary healthcare system will not try again. As the poet said: "Not yet, O Freedom, close thy lids in slumber, for thine enemy never sleeps." Those who love freedom can never rest.

Justin Raimondo, editorial director of [Antiwar.com](#), said:

Senate passage of the healthcare "reform" bill looks increasingly unlikely. At this point, I wouldn't be at all surprised to see it carried over into next year.

The fallout? It makes the Democrats look like they're unable to govern, but, aside from that, I think you'll hear a huge sigh of relief emanating from Capitol Hill. With no public option, and all kinds of mysterious provisions that keep popping up and provoking yet more opposition (from both the left and the right), this bill has become a huge albatross hung 'round the neck of the Democratic party. The average person, who

is going to be forced to buy insurance — or who will see his or her health insurance subjected to an onerous tax — is not going to be happy with this. So the fallout is going to be that the average voter will learn to look at anything they call "reform" with a very jaundiced eye.

Hal Lewis, professor at U.C. Santa Barbara, said:

Probably not, but this Senate is unpredictable. As for fallout, there will be no fallout if they do nothing, but there will be major fallout if they fall into the trap of messing up the world's best medical system. Yes there is a major problem with increasing medical costs, but it will not be solved by treating doctors as if they were postal workers.

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