

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14, 2009

Lieberman May Torpedo Health Care Reform

Connecticut Senator Tells Majority Leader He's Prepared to Support GOP Filibuster; Opposed to Medicare Buy-In,

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Play CBS Video Is "Tremendous Momentum" Building On Health Care?

Sens. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.), Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) and Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.) spoke with Bob Schieffer about the momentum building for health reform in the Senate, even though apprehension exists over abortion language.



Sens. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., right, and Ben Nelson, D-Neb., appear on CBS's "Face the Nation" in Washington, Dec. 13, 2009. (Face the Nation/Karin Cooper)

(CBS/AP) Senate Democrats who thought they had found a workable compromise on health care reform learned otherwise from independent Sen. Joe Lieberman over the weekend.

The Connecticut senator, whose vote is critical to the bill's prospects, threatened Sunday to join Republicans in opposing health care legislation if it permits uninsured individuals as young as 55 to purchase Medicare coverage.

Lieberman expressed his opposition twice Sunday: first in an [interview with CBS' "Face the Nation"](#) and more strongly later, according to Democratic officials, in a private meeting with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

Reid, who is hoping to pass the legislation by Christmas, needs 60 votes to overcome Republican objections and has been counting on Lieberman to provide one.

But appearing on **"Face the Nation,"** Lieberman said of the Medicare proposal, "Though I don't know exactly what's in it, from what I hear, I certainly would have a hard time voting for it because it has some of the same infirmities that the public option did.

"It will add taxpayer costs. It will add to the deficit. It's unnecessary," he added of a provision that Reid last week hailed as part of a breakthrough between liberals and moderates.

Democratic aides, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Lieberman later told Reid he would support a Republican-led filibuster against the bill if it contained

the Medicare provision or permitted the government to sell insurance in competition with private companies.

The same aides added that Lieberman had responded differently last week when Reid asked him privately about the proposed Medicare provision. "He voiced support for the idea," said one official. Lieberman's public comments last week were also generally favorable. The aides spoke on condition of anonymity, saying they were not authorized to comment publicly.

In an interview that aired Sunday night - but was recorded last week - President Barack Obama voiced optimism about his call for sweeping legislation to expand coverage while cracking down on the insurance industry.

"I think it's going to [pass out of the Senate before Christmas,](#)" he told CBS' **"60 Minutes."**

Republicans say that's unlikely.

"With the American people as overwhelmingly opposed to this bill as they are, for the Democrats to

negotiations last week between liberals and moderates that produced the general framework that included the Medicare provision.

Nelson also is seeking stricter abortion restrictions than are currently in the bill.

"The whole reason we're doing this bill is to bring down cost, first for the American people in health care, and secondly for the deficit," said Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri. "So until we get the numbers back from the Congressional Budget Office, we're all on hold."

Asked if she would vote against the bill if it raised health care costs overall, she said, "Absolutely."

Lieberman, Nelson and McConnell spoke on "Face the Nation." McCaskill was on "Fox News Sunday."

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