

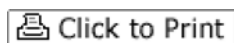
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Reconciliation showdown ahead on health care?

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Budget reconciliation could allow Senate vote, get around GOP filibuster to pass health care
- Democratic senator: Procedure could be a way to "move forward on health care reform"
- GOP senator: "It would be a political kamikaze mission ... if they jam this through"
- White House official: "I believe that we will have the votes to pass this in Congress"

Washington (CNN) -- With the health care summit showing no sign of getting either side to budge, lawmakers are staking out positions in the battle many believe is imminent: a presidential effort to push legislation through without Republican support.

On the political talk shows Sunday, Democratic and GOP leaders fought over budget reconciliation, the parliamentary procedure that could allow a vote in the Senate and circumvent a GOP filibuster.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, told CNN's "State of the Union" that he and other lawmakers "do not think something of this magnitude ought to be jammed down the throats of a public that doesn't want it through this kind of device."

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tennessee, told ABC's "This Week," "It would be a political kamikaze mission for the Democratic Party if they jam this through."

But Democrats cast it as a chance to enact critical reforms. "We'd really like to get a bipartisan bill," Sen. Robert Menendez, D-New Jersey, told "Fox News Sunday." "In the absence of that," he added, the maneuver could help the country "move forward on [health care reform](#)."

The tactic allows a measure to pass on a simple majority vote of 51, rather than the 60 needed to break a filibuster.

Facing staunch Republican opposition and having lost a 60-vote supermajority in the Senate with the election of Republican Sen. Scott Brown of Massachusetts, [President Obama](#) has been considering turning to budget reconciliation.

"He's going to have more to say later this week how he thinks is the best way to move forward," Nancy-Ann DeParle, director of the White House Office of Health Reform, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

If the reconciliation tactic is used, it technically would not be on the full package of reforms.

"Reconciliation cannot be used to pass comprehensive health care reform," Sen. Kent Conrad, D-North Dakota, chairman of the Budget Committee, told CBS' "Face the Nation." He added, "It won't work because it was never designed for that kind of significant legislation."

But under the scenario Democrats are considering, the procedure could prove to be the key to enacting the full package of reforms.

To get to the president's desk, a bill must first win passage in the House of Representatives and Senate. Last year, the two chambers voted -- and passed -- different versions of the bill. They differ on key points.

Democratic sources have said the general plan is for the House to pass the version the Senate passed last year with 60 votes. Meanwhile, negotiators in both chambers would agree to a separate package of changes to that legislation. That package would go before the Senate under reconciliation rules.

In an interview broadcast Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union," House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#), D-California, did not describe how a reconciliation scenario might play out. But she said, "When we have a bill, which we will in a matter of days, then that is the bill that we can sell."

Pelosi also sought to remove some of the stigma that might accompany legislation passed by one party with no bipartisan support.

"The bill can be bipartisan even though the votes might not be bipartisan, because they [Republicans] have made their imprint on this," she said.

Pelosi noted the final bill likely would not include a government-run public health insurance option, a provision vigorously opposed by congressional Republicans but supported by liberal Democrats.

"We went into the legislative process -- hundreds of hours of hearings and bill writing and all the rest -- where the Republicans made their suggestions," Pelosi told CNN senior political correspondent Candy Crowley. "We know that one of the reasons we didn't have a bill in the fall is because the president wanted to give the Senate more time to arrive at bipartisanship in the Senate bill, which he thought might be possible then."

She added, "And so what we've had is the year of trying to strive for bipartisanship -- as I say, over 100 Republican amendments in the bill."

DeParle, the White House point person on health care reform, expressed confidence. "I believe that we will have the votes to pass this in Congress," she told NBC. "I believe that the president will keep fighting and that the American people want to have this kind of health reform."

Budget reconciliation was established in 1974 to make it easier for the Senate to pass bills that would lower the nation's deficit. Since then, it has been used to vote on other issues. In total, the procedure has been used 22 times, and every president since Jimmy Carter has signed into law bills achieved through reconciliation.

Reconciliation language involving health care was included in the 2010 budget -- to some controversy at the time -- so the procedure could be invoked in this case.

The White House has noted that every Republican senator who took part in last week's health care summit has voted for a reconciled bill in the past.

But Republicans said that doesn't justify its use for such sweeping legislation.


"Just because it has been used before for lesser issues doesn't mean it's appropriate for this issue," [McConnell](#) said.

And Alexander said that if the bill passes through reconciliation, a new set of headaches begin for Democrats.

"Then for the rest of the year," he told ABC, "we're going to be involved in a campaign to repeal it."

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