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# Senator Sanders Offers Medicare-For-All Amendment In Senate

THURSDAY, 03 DECEMBER 2009 15:10 PRESS RELEASE HEALTH CARE REFORM

( 18 Votes )

CHICAGO--(ENEWSPPF)--December 3, 2009. Challenging head-on the powerful private insurance and pharmaceutical industries, Sen. Bernie Sanders introduced an amendment to the Senate health reform bill Wednesday that would replace the bulk of the Senate bill's language with provisions establishing a single-payer, Medicare-for-All program.

Joining with Sanders, I-Vt., in co-sponsoring the measure, known as Senate Amendment 2837, were Senators Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Roland Burris, D-Ill. Other senators, including Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, have previously declared their support for single-payer health reform. The vote on the measure could take place in the next few days.

"This amendment starts from the premise that health care is a human right, and that every citizen, rich or poor, should have access to health care, just as every citizen has access to the fire department, the police or public schools," a statement from Sanders' office said.

The single-payer approach embodied in Sanders' amendment stands in sharp contrast to the reform models being offered by the Senate and House leadership and the White House. Those bills would enhance the central role of private health insurers.

Sanders' amendment, on the other hand, would replace the present crazy-quilt array of for-profit insurers with a single nonprofit, public financing agency, thereby slashing administrative waste in the system and redirecting the savings to clinical care.

Dr. Quentin Young, national coordinator of Physicians for a National Health Program, said, "This historic move by Sen. Sanders and his colleagues - it's the first time single payer will be voted upon on the floor of the Senate - is yet another sign of the strong and growing support for an improved Medicare for All among the public and the medical profession.

"In contrast, the Senate leadership's deeply flawed bill doesn't expand coverage until 2014, would still leave 24 million uninsured, and would place no effective constraints on exploding costs," he said. "Sanders amendment would cover everyone from the start and allow for effective cost-containment.

"Physicians and patients alike stand to gain enormously from the adoption of this measure," Young said. "No effort should be spared to ask every senator to vote yes on Senate Amendment 2837."

Sanders' measure, which is largely patterned after a bill he introduced last March, the American Health Security Act (S. 703), would cover all of the 46 million Americans who currently lack coverage and improve benefits for all Americans by eliminating co-pays and deductibles and restoring free choice of physician.

Highlights of the amendment include the following:

- \* Patients go to any doctor or hospital of their choice.
- \* Comprehensive benefits, including coverage for dental, mental health, and prescription drugs.
- \* By eliminating the high overhead and profits of the private, investor-owned insurance industry, along with the burdensome paperwork imposed on physicians, hospitals and other providers, the plan saves at least \$400 billion annually - enough money to provide comprehensive, quality care to all.
- \* Community health centers are fully funded, giving the 60 million Americans now living in rural and underserved areas access to care.
- \* To address the critical shortage of primary care physicians and dentists, the bill provides resources for the National Health Service Corps to train an additional 24,000 health professionals.
- \* The program is paid for by combining current sources of government health spending into a single fund with modest new payroll and income taxes amounting to less than what most businesses and people now pay for insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses.
- \* While federally funded, the program is to be administered by the states.

Sanders, who serves on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, is a longtime advocate of fundamental health care reform.

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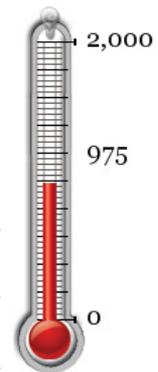
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