

## Senate Health Care Reform Bill Receives 60 Votes to Proceed

At approximately 1:15 a.m. this morning, all 58 Democrats and the 2 Democratic leaning independents in the United States Senate voted to invoke cloture so that the *Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act* (H.R. 3590) can continue to be debated with a final vote expected on or before Christmas eve. All 40 Republicans voted against invoking cloture, including Maine's senior Senator Olympia Snowe who announced on NBC's *Meet the Press* on Sunday that she could not vote for the bill given that the process precluded a full understanding and debate on its provisions. "This beat the clock is overriding legislative sanity," she noted.

The early Monday morning vote essentially ensures that the bill will pass the Senate this week, modified by a 383-page "manager's amendment" (S. Amdt. 3276) offered by Majority Leader Harry Reid and prepared just a day or two prior to the vote. Among the provisions in the amendment is a section deleting the one-year delay in the Medicare payment reduction for physicians brought about by the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula. Majority Leader Reid stated that he dropped the one-year fix in order to prepare legislation in January that would provide for a permanent fix, as is included in the House bill.

The Senate bill, once passed, will have to be reconciled with the House bill. That process is expected to begin once the Congress returns from a three-week holiday recess. Although there are very significant differences between the bills, most observers believe that a final bill will pass both bodies, and that the bill will look a lot more like the Senate bill than the House bill. The notion of a "public option" included in the House bill is effectively dead as its inclusion would likely preclude the final bill from receiving the necessary 60 votes in the Senate.

At its core, the Senate bill would cover an additional 31 million people or 94% of the eligible population, at a cost of \$871 billion. The bill is paid for by new taxes on high cost health plans, taxes on businesses and fees charged to persons who do not purchase coverage. It has been the subject of vigorous debate and has been attacked by both conservatives who believe it constitutes a government takeover of health care and liberals who believe it doesn't go far enough in providing coverage and in reigning in private insurance companies. Physicians and physician organizations have been split as well, with the AMA supporting reform and many of the specialty societies opposing the bill.

The debate will continue through the recess and the process of reconciliation and the final vote. MMA will continue to report on the health system reform debate through the *Maine Medicine Weekly Update*.

You can find the AMA's coverage of the latest Senate action in the health system reform debate on the web here:

[http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/road-doctor-rohack.shtml?plckController=Blog&plckScript=blogScript&plckElementId=blogDest&plckBlogPage=BlogViewTag&plckBlogId=Blog:21ae8cdf-e382-40c9-87cf-32c8561d0531&plckTag=health\\_reform](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/road-doctor-rohack.shtml?plckController=Blog&plckScript=blogScript&plckElementId=blogDest&plckBlogPage=BlogViewTag&plckBlogId=Blog:21ae8cdf-e382-40c9-87cf-32c8561d0531&plckTag=health_reform)