

## **U.S. Senate Conducts Final Health Care Vote on Christmas Eve**

Voting on Christmas Eve for the first time since 1895, last Thursday the U.S. Senate passed its version of health care reform (H.R. 3590) by a party-line 60-39 tally just after 7 a.m. The \$871 billion bill is expected to cover an additional 31 million individuals, reform the health insurance industry, and cut Medicare spending by almost \$500 billion. The Senate Democratic leadership is expected to cut its Christmas break short and return to Washington to begin negotiations with the House leadership in hopes of delivering a final bill to the President by the State of the Union address, usually the third Tuesday in January.

Following the Christmas Eve vote, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) said differences over how to pay for new federal health insurance subsidies and abortion coverage limits will be two of the biggest issues in the conference. Most observers believe that the final version of the health care reform bill will look more like the Senate bill than the House bill (H.R. 3962) because reform proponents cannot lose one vote for final enactment in the Senate.

The AMA issued a detailed memo outlining its rationale for supporting the Senate bill on December 23, 2009 which may be found on the web at:

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/health-system-reform/bulletin/23dec2009.shtml>.

The Kaiser Family Foundation has a side-by-side chart comparing aspects of the House and Senate bills on the web at: <http://www.kff.org/healthreform/sidebyside.cfm>.

Though overshadowed by the latest terror threat, the health care reform debate remained a focus of the news media in the days following the debate. *The New York Times*, its editorial board a strong supporter of reform efforts, included an analysis of the House and Senate bills on its editorial page yesterday: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/27/opinion/27sun1.html?ref=opinion> .

The MMA will keep you posted on the House and Senate conference committee negotiations through the *Maine Medicine Weekly Update*.