

President Reveals New Health Care Proposal Today in Advance of Thursday Summit

Today, the White House is expected to release on its website a new health care reform proposal in advance of the televised bi-partisan summit being held on Thursday, February 15th. The bill is said to be somewhat of a compromise based on the previously passed House and Senate bills. At this point, it is not clear the extent to which invited Republicans will participate or be willing to advance their own proposal in lieu of the President's.

Also, there still is the very real possibility that the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate will seek to pass a health care reform bill through the budget "reconciliation" process which does not require the super-majority 60 votes in the Senate. Only a simple majority is required, but the rules regarding reconciliation limit the contents of such a bill to items affecting the federal budget. While many of the provisions in the previously considered House and Senate bills certainly impact the budget, many others do not. Some observers have even suggested that the controversial "public option" could be included under this scenario.

The Congress returns to Washington today following its President's Day holiday. In interviews with Maine newspapers last week, Senator Susan Collins stated that she believed a reform bill could be passed within six weeks if Democrats took a bi-partisan approach to the subject. She noted that there continues to be widespread support in both parties for provisions that assist small business, reform commercial insurance practices, and promote wellness and health promotion programs. Her advice to Republican leaders was to view the invitation to the summit as a good faith effort and to arrive there with a consensus list of provisions that Republicans could support.

Maine's senior Senator Olympia Snowe has consistently stated that she believes the *status quo* is unacceptable and that passage of a reform bill is essential. Both she and Senator Collins are seen as key players in any possible bi-partisan approach.

You can find information about the President's proposal on the web at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/Issues/health-Care>.