



Don't silence the minority

By Judd Gregg

USA TODAY, March 18, 2010

Congress is now in uncharted waters. The Democratic majority is on the cusp of using every procedural gambit at its disposal to ram through a massive government takeover of the U.S. health care system.

Passed by the Senate along party lines, the health care bill explodes government regulation, and even worse, it explodes government spending by \$2.4 trillion from 2014-23 — debt that will be passed on to our children. The bill does nothing to reduce the cost of health care or long-term spending, and still leaves 23 million people uninsured.

The bill is so bad that even many House Democrats are loath to vote for it. Forty-eight percent of Americans do not want this bill and have made that point clear.

Undeterred, House Democratic leaders are determined to drag this bill over the finish line with tactics that will circumvent anyone — Republican or Democrat— who objects.

The first trick is to use a budget procedure called "reconciliation" to entice nervous House Democrats to pass the Senate-passed health care bill. The reconciliation bill will supposedly "fix" items House Democrats can't stomach. Put another way, it will be used to buy Democratic votes in the House.

In theory, this "buy-it" bill would go to the Senate where it will enjoy privileged status — a mere 20 hours of debate — and only require 51 votes for passage. Whether Senate Democrats will agree to those changes once their bill has been enacted is something House Democrats are right to worry about.

In fact, House Democrats are so worried that a second trick has emerged — "deeming" the Senate health care bill passed, so that no one has to vote for the health care legislation. This sleight of hand is a new low in cowardly behavior. It has rightly triggered outrage among Americans.

While reconciliation is a legitimate fiscal policy tool, it was never intended to be used to make policy for one-sixth of our economy. It should not be used to buy votes on the House floor. It should not be used to silence the minority on an issue this important.

Everyone agrees that the health care system in this country is broken. Why can't we also agree that reform should be a bipartisan effort, with an open, transparent debate where all voices can be heard? The Democratic leadership's scorched-earth strategy will do irreparable damage to our constitutional legislative process, put us on a fast track to massive debt and bankruptcy, and fundamentally harm health care in America.

Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., is the senior Republican on the Senate Budget Committee.

<http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2010/03/opposing-view-dont-silence-the-minority.html>