

United States Senate
OFFICE OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

March 4, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-0001

Dear Leader Reid:

We understand from press reports and comments that you and the Speaker have made that the House and Senate will use the budget reconciliation process to overhaul our nation's health care system, which represents 1/6th of our economy. We urge you to not use reconciliation to pass a partisan bill that is opposed by the majority of Americans.

The American people have been paying close attention to the health reform debate; they understand the issues being discussed and they have expressed broad opposition not only to the substance of the health reform bills, but also to the process by which those bills have been developed. According to a February 24 CNN poll, 73 percent of Americans believe Congress should either start over on an "entirely new bill" or not do health care reform at all this year. A Gallup survey released February 25 showed that the majority of Americans oppose using reconciliation to expedite passage of health reform legislation through the Senate.

Overhauling our health care system will affect every single American and is simply too important to be passed without broad bipartisan support. Yet, it is clear that the only reason you are considering using the budget reconciliation process to pass this unpopular bill is because you have not been able to attract any Republican support for your comprehensive health bill.

We recommend you rethink your plans of expediting such legislation through Congress over the strong objections of the American people. We urge you to listen to the advice of Senator Robert C. Byrd, who was quoted in the Washington Post on March 22, 2009:

I am certain that putting health-care reform and climate change legislation on a freight train through Congress is an outrage that must be resisted.

Using the reconciliation process to enact major legislation prevents an open debate about critical issues in full view of the public. Health reform and climate change are issues that, in one way or another, touch every American family. Their resolution carries serious economic and emotional consequences.

The misuse of the arcane process of reconciliation -- a process intended for deficit reduction -- to enact substantive policy changes is an undemocratic disservice to our people and to the Senate's institutional role.

We agree with this assessment—misusing the Senate rules in this way would be a tremendous “disservice” to the American people and it is “an outrage” that we should resist.


In that regard, to endeavor to ensure that the reconciliation process is not used to fast-track an unpopular bill through Congress, we wish to inform you that we will oppose efforts to waive the so-called Byrd Rule during Senate consideration of any reconciliation bill concerning health reform. The Byrd Rule, as you know, was created by Senator Byrd to ensure that reconciliation bills were not used to enact policy changes, the primary purpose of which is not specifically related to the federal budget. As it takes 60 votes to waive the Byrd Rule, we can ensure that any provision that trips the Byrd Rule will be stripped from the bill, which will require that the bill be sent back to the House for further consideration and additional votes.

We urge you to abandon the use of reconciliation to pass a partisan bill that is opposed by the vast majority of Americans. Instead, we encourage you to work with us on a series of bipartisan bills that provide a step-by-step approach to reducing the cost of health care for Americans.

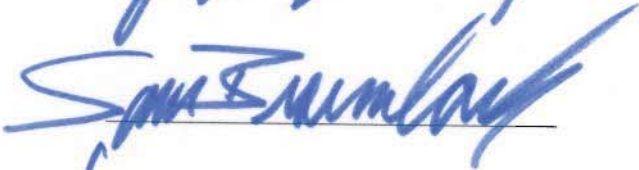
Sincerely,



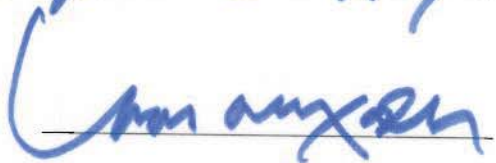
Mitch McConnell



Olympia Snowe



Sam Brownback



Chris Wyden



Susan Collins



Susan Collins



Paul White



Paul White

Phil G
George J. Ri
Darryl Chandler
Chuck Stanley
Mike Cruso
George V. Voinovich
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John Barrasso

John Ensign
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Royce Wicker
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Jeff Sessions
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Orrin Hatch
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John Truena

Paul Roberts

Bob

Kay Bailey Hutchison

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Richard Shelby

Paul Cochran

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