



Is Obamacare on Life Support?

Just as it seemed that recalcitrant receiver Senator Joe Lieberman caught President Barack Obama's last minute healthcare Hail Mary pass, Howard Dean may have rushed in at the last moment and broken up the play. Replay officials will now have to decide whether Lieberman bobbled the ball or whether Howard Dean's hit was too little too late and the healthcare legislation will score after all.



Former Democratic Party Chairman and former Vermont Governor, Howard Dean, put in his two cents regarding the healthcare overhaul and President Obama's recent hard sell to true believers and agnostic members of the Democratic caucus. Dean's message: Kill the bill. Period. As Dean sees it, the bill has been vitiated by unacceptable compromises and after all the carving and culling there's nothing more than a carcass barely recognizable as the once progressive and corpulent measure that was originally prepped and prepared by President Obama and his sous chef, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.)

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Dean, a physician by training, put a fine point on his denouncement of the version of the healthcare bill currently being debated by the Senate. "You will be forced to buy insurance. If you don't you will pay a fine. This is a bigger bailout for the insurance industry than AIG," Dean told ABC's *Good Morning America*. Dean feels that his party has betrayed one of its progressive platform planks and in doing so has robbed Americans of opportunities for real and lasting reform. "This bill is bad for the country," he declared.

Lest his opposition to the healthcare bill be misinterpreted as some newly found fiscal conservatism or allegiance to the Constitution, Dean told Vermont Public Radio that among the primary reasons he favors scrapping the bill is the elimination of the Medicare buy-in provision by those seeking middle ground between liberal Democrats in favor of a whole cloth public-option and "moderates" wary of new entitlements and ballooning deficits. "This [removal of the Medicare buy-in clause] is essentially the collapse of healthcare reform in the United States Senate," lamented Dean. In his view, all the cave-ins to corporate concerns, compromises with various blocs of Senators, and corners cut to satisfy special interests have "stripped the bill of its true reforms."

As the intra-squad scrimmage continues, apparently potential playmaker (or breaker) Joe Lieberman (I-



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Conn.) decided to join the huddle and run the route called by the quarterback-in-chief. After Tuesday's pep rally and the indication from co-captain Harry Reid that the aforementioned Medicare buy-in provision would be dropped from the healthcare playbook, Lieberman seemed to back down from his "my way or the highway" announcement made just days before. "We've got a great health insurance reform bill here," Lieberman told reporters. "What's beginning to emerge — though I know some people are not happy about it — is really a historic achievement: health care reform such as we've not seen in this country for decades," he exulted.

With Lieberman onboard and pro-life gadfly Senator Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) finding wiggle-room despite the bill's lack of unqualified abortion proscription, there seems to be little standing in the way of the implementation of a new, nationalized healthcare scheme from becoming the law of the land. Debate continues, however, and there is still a chance that although there is little hope of a sufficient cadre of senators experiencing a constitutional epiphany and deciding to restrain themselves according to that sacred document they have sworn to uphold, there may yet be a few lawmakers with enough common sense to vex passage of this behemoth and its concomitant bureaucracy and tax burden.

December 15 saw more amendments offered by Republicans aimed at derailing the measure that seemed to be gaining steam thanks to Lieberman's waffling. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) moved to have the bill sent back to the Senate Finance Committee in order that increases in taxes and levies included in the bill (money earmarked in various parts of the legislation to fund the over 100 new agencies created by it) be removed. The motion failed by a vote of 54-45. Another amendment by Senator Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) sought to permit the import of low-cost foreign prescription drugs. This amendment was doomed in light of the agreement President Obama made with Big Pharma earlier in the year guaranteeing the drug manufacturers that Obamacare would not harm their industry — in exchange for their support of the proposed legislation.

While the GOP appears to present a united front against passage of the bill, two left-leaning Republican senators are being leaned on by Senator Reid. Senators Snowe and Collins, both representing Maine, are being wooed by Reid in hopes that they will agree to put him on their dance cards when it comes time for the final up or down vote on health care reform. While Senator Snowe seems particularly flattered (especially after the jettisoning of the Medicare buy-in provision), Senator Collins has repeatedly rebuffed Senator Reid's advances. Given the on-again, off-again allegiance of Senators Lieberman and Nelson, an alliance with the senators from Maine would give Senator Reid the buffer he needs to assure he has the 60 votes necessary to a successful end-run around Republican procedural obstacles.

Again, there are several forces that have united to propel healthcare legislation through the Congress, no matter how dear the cost or how cannibalistic the compromise. President Obama considers the enactment of this measure to be the *sine qua non* of his legacy, Senator Reid has a history of self-obsession and that debate and all its sideshows feeds that beast, Joe Lieberman craves attention and the "Will he? Won't he?" drama he is starring in is providing him plenty of it. As said before in this magazine, the Congress is more often the setting for unholy alliances than holy wars and this healthcare debacle is the prototypical demonstration of that truth.

All hope is not lost, however. It is said that politics makes strange bedfellows and one of the strangest to come along in this pantomime is Howard Dean. While certainly no reliable resistor to the current of socialism, Dean has rightly recognized a few of the flaws (albeit minor ones) in the bill before the Senate. As John McManus, president of The John Birch Society, counseled constitutionalists: "The



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advice given the Senate by Howard Dean is precisely what should be done. The healthcare bill is a monstrous piece of legislation that is unconstitutional, hugely expensive, and remarkably threatening to the best healthcare system in the world. While the recommendation given by Dean is surprising coming from him, let's remember that a stopped clock registers the correct time twice each day. He's correct in this instance and his recommendation should be acted upon favorably."

This is the hour that Howard Dean's clock is telling the right time. And, it is the precise hour for concerned and committed Americans to communicate to their elected representatives their steadfast opposition to the nationalization of the healthcare industry in this country. The border between success and failure of the measure is razor thin and enough pressure on key senators and America will enter the New Year without the injury of Christmas credit card bills being augmented by the injury of tax increases to fund the creation of a federal medical care leviathan.

Photo of Howard Dean: AP Images



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