



Insight

Nelson Caved for This?

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National Review Online

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I'm sitting here digesting the news of Ben Nelson's caving to the pressure and the Dems passing the Reid bill. I don't get it. Honestly. I realize that passing a health-care bill has become a political imperative. But I don't understand why this bill meets the need.

To begin, it is extremely unpopular. Sixty-four percent of Americans don't think it meets their priorities for reform. And it will be even more unpopular in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 — years in which the harsh medicine of higher taxes and regulatory takeover will produce sharp premium increases and less satisfactory care. Only in 2014 does the massive redistribution start, and Dems might get some relief from their purchased constituencies.

On top of that, the schedule is now such that they will have to go back to the House in early 2010 and deal with a likely revolt against the absence of a "public plan" and the tax on "Cadillac" plans. So, just at the time when Obama is going to need Dems to close ranks and support him on Afghanistan, the ranks will be splitting. Why pass a bill that will create more problems for the divided party?

Finally, it is now clear that the pressure is rising over the massive spending and deficits. Obama will clearly want to devote substantial rhetorical effort on this front in the State of the Union speech, and put out a budget that has at least cosmetic fiscal courage. To do this at the same time he might be signing a budget-busting \$2.5 trillion health-spending bill will make a mockery of the effort.

So, count me disappointed that we didn't get real reform. But count me baffled as to why we got this.

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