Obama Waits Finished Health Care Bill

Steven R. Hurst, AP

The White House is waiting for Congress to settle on a final health care bill, even though President Barack Obama has a clear preference in favor of at least one specific — the much-debated public option.

President Obama, however, will not demand that legislation include a government-run insurance plan intended to drive down costs through competition with private insurers, they said.
Instead, the White House will let Congress work out the details required to get something passed.

“There will be compromise. There will be legislation, and it will achieve our goals: helping people who have insurance get more security, more accountability for the insurance industry, helping people who don't have insurance get insurance they can afford, and lowering the overall cost of the system,” presidential adviser David Axelrod said.

The White House and lawmakers are trying to blend five House and Senate committee versions of health care reform legislation into a bill that will pass both houses. Near unanimous Republican opposition is expected.

The bill approved last week by the Senate Finance Committee drew the only Republican vote yet cast with Democrats on the health care overhaul. Even then, Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, did not commit to supporting the final version of the legislation. House Democrats are insisting on the government-run plan, or public option. In the Senate, Republicans and some Democrats oppose the measure, meaning inclusion of the public option would fail to gain the 60 votes needed to overcome a Republican filibuster. Some in the Senate strongly support inclusion of the public option.

President Obama “will obviously weigh in when it's important to weigh in” on the possibility of a public option, chief of staff Rahm Emanuel said. Added Obama senior adviser Valerie Jarrett: “He's not demanding that it's in there. He thinks it's the best possible choice.”

The president promoted his health care initiative Saturday in his weekly radio and online address, and challenged policy makers to resist special interests. He accused the insurance industry of “filling the airwaves with deceptive and dishonest ads” and paying for studies “designed to mislead the American people.”

Axelrod was noncommittal when pressed about whether Obama would support taxing insurance benefits, a proposal that has brought criticism from labor unions and others. “I think that this thing is going to be adjusted as we go along,” he said,

“so let's see what the final proposal says before we talk about what the president will or won't sign.”

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