

Poll: Less Fear For Healthcare Overhaul

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With President Barack Obama's health care overhaul in limbo, Americans' fears about its effect on them eased in January, according to a poll released as the president tries to revive sweeping Democratic legislation. The monthly poll from the non-partisan Robert Wood Johnson Foundation also found that three-fourths of Americans still think it's important that the President include health care reform in addressing the nation's economic crisis — even if many have misgivings.

“Job numbers continue to lag and nearly a quarter of Americans are still concerned they might lose coverage,” said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president of the foundation, a philanthropic and research organization that supports health care reform. The poll found that the proportion of Americans who said they feared their access to doctors and hospitals would get worse under the Democratic plans dropped to 29 percent, from 33 percent who had expressed such concerns in December. In the January poll fewer than 12 percent said that they thought their access would improve.

President Obama's plan would extend coverage to around 95 percent of Americans — up from about 84 percent today. They would require most Americans to carry health insurance, with government help to make premiums more affordable. Insurance companies would be barred from denying coverage to people with health problems. New insurance markets would be created for small businesses and people who buy their own coverage, but Americans covered through large employers would not see major changes.

That plan — or something very close to it — appeared to be only a step away from Obama's desk until January 19, when Massachusetts voters elected Republican Scott Brown to replace the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. Democrats lost their 60-vote Senate majority, and the ability to override Republican objections to the bill. Health care overhaul slipped into congressional limbo, and has been stuck there ever since.

On other measures, pessimists tended to outnumber optimists on health care overhaul.

- Nearly 31 percent said they thought the Democratic bills would make their personal financial situation worse, compared with 10 percent who said it would improve their family budgets.
- Forty-two percent said the nation's fiscal condition would suffer because of the legislation, compared with 26 percent who said it would get better.
- Americans were divided on whether the Democrats' approach would improve overall access to health care around the country, with 35 percent

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saying it would, and nearly that many disagreeing.

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