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Letters for Monday, Sept. 28, 2009

Monday, September 28, 2009
THE RECORD

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Keep public option

out of Baucus bill

When it comes to politics, the best sign that you've got it right is when you're being attacked from both sides. The long-awaited bill from the Senate Finance Committee, led by Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., is drawing criticism from Democrats and Republicans alike, signaling that he may be onto something.

More than 500 amendments to the Baucus bill are currently being considered in the Senate, some of which attempt to pull the legislation in one direction or another — others that are clearly aimed at sinking it.

As a member of the New Jersey Association of Health Underwriters, I commend President Obama for saying he will not sign a bill that will increase the deficit. The Baucus bill currently stays within those lines, according to the Congressional Budget Office. But adding a public plan will drive up the cost of the bill to the point where it will no longer be revenue-neutral.

Obama has told us we will be able to keep our current health insurance if we are happy with it. But adding a public plan that competes on unequal footing with private plans will change the whole equation.

As the public plan dictates what it will pay doctors and hospitals — just as Medicare and Medicaid do — lost revenue will be shifted onto private plan ratepayers. As a health insurance broker, I am aware of how insurance premiums affect families and small businesses. I don't want to have to tell my clients that their rates are subsidizing someone else's coverage.

For these reasons, the Baucus bill does not contain a public plan. I would urge lawmakers to refrain from adding one.

Brad Greenbaum

Caldwell, Sept. 25

The writer is a member of the New Jersey Association of Health Underwriters.

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The Senate Finance Committee is composed of 13 Democrats, including Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey, and 10 Republicans. Republican Sen. Jim Bunning of Kentucky authored an amendment that would have required a health care overhaul bill to be available online for 72 hours before the committee votes in order to satisfy constituents' demands to read bills before voting takes place.

Democrats, with the exception of Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, rejected the amendment. They agreed to make conceptual language, instead of legislative language, available online before a vote.

Conceptual language does not include a Congressional Budget Office cost estimate. Bunning's amendment would have required the committee to have the legislative language of the bill, along with the CBO cost estimate. Democrats argue that this would delay the vote by weeks.

What are the Democrats afraid of?

Peter Stonitsch

Harrington Park, Sept. 24

Adding nothing

to political debate



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