



NEWS / PROFESSION

S.1955 Laid to Rest: Controversial Health Care Bill Effectively Defeated

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The chiropractic profession joined a long list of provider and consumer groups declaring legislative victory on May 11, 2006, as S.1955, the controversial Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act, was withdrawn from the Senate floor and effectively defeated after Democrats threatened to filibuster the bill.

As expected, deliberations on the bill began Tuesday, May 9, when Senate Democrats voted to allow S.1955 to advance to the Senate floor - a reportedly procedural move. Debate was limited to 30 hours and ended Thursday afternoon, at which time Senate Majority Leader, Bill Frist, MD, (R-TN) announced that limited amendments to the bill would be considered. Senate Democrats voted against cloture and the bill was pulled from consideration.



Had the bill passed, provisions in S.1955 would have allowed for the creation of small business health plans (also known as association health plans), to offer insurance coverage through nonprofit organizations on behalf of the small businesses that make up their memberships. The bill was introduced in November 2005 by Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY), the chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. While S.1955's stated purpose was to expand health care access while reducing insurance costs, it contained language that would exempt association health plans from having to comply with state regulations regarding health care coverage.

Currently, many states require insurers to cover specific conditions and treatments, including chiropractic; several states also have mandates in place which prohibit insurers from refusing or limiting coverage to people based on age or health history. Lobbyists, consumer groups, and other

opposed organizations purported that S.1955 would leave consumers unprotected without mandated benefits and weakened internal grievance procedures.

In a statement from the American Chiropractic Association, President Richard Brassard, DC, expressed a word of thanks to those who opposed S.1955 and helped lay to rest a potential threat to the profession.

"The ACA extends an enormous 'thank you' to the entire chiropractic profession - state associations, individual doctors, patients, students, chiropractic college leaders and other organizations - everyone who joined together to successfully defeat this potentially devastating legislation. A special thank you also goes out to our allies in Congress, Senators Tom Harkin, Jeff Bingaman, Ted Kennedy, Harry Reid and others, for their outstanding leadership on this important issue. Not only did we safeguard the health coverage of millions of patients across the country, but we also showed the nation's decision-makers that the chiropractic profession is a force to be reckoned with. I can assure you that your thousands of e-mails, faxes and phone calls to Congress, letters and news releases to local media organizations, and other grassroots efforts made the difference."

"Today, we can breathe a great sigh of relief, but only for a moment," added Dr. Brassard. "The small business or health association plan concept is a popular one, and a new bill will almost certainly surface in the very near future."

Resources/Notes

1. "S.1955 Falls on Procedural Vote." Press release from The American Chiropractic Association, May 11, 2006.
2. For background information on S.1955, please read "Advocacy in Action: Profession Mobilizes Against Controversial Health Care Bill," printed in the May 6, 2006 issue of *DC* and available online at www.chiroweb.com/archives/24/10/01.html, and "S.1955 Under Fire: Opposition Grows," printed in the May 22, 2006 issue of *DC* and available online at www.chiroweb.com/archives/24/11/14.html.
3. In legislative terms, a *filibuster* is "An informal term for any attempt to block or delay Senate action on a bill or other matter by debating it at length, by offering numerous procedural motions, or by any other delaying or obstructive actions. *Cloture* is The only procedure by which the Senate can vote to place a time limit on consideration of a bill or other matter, and thereby overcome a filibuster. Under the cloture rule (Rule XXII), the Senate may limit consideration of a pending matter to 30 additional hours, but only by vote of three-fifths of the full Senate, normally 60 votes (Source: www.senate.gov/reference/glossary_term).

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