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Prescriptions

Making Sense of the Health Care Debate

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A Little Light Reading From the Senate Legislative Counsel's Office

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Well, what were you expecting? Once upon a time? A princess and happily ever after? On the Prescriptions blog?

Fine. Once upon a time, in the land of purple mountain majesties, there were 46 million people without health insurance.

We pause our story now for a news bulletin: The legislative language of the Senate Finance Committee's health care bill has been posted to the [committee's Web site](#) – all 1,502 pages of it.

And here's how it starts: "A Bill. To provide affordable, quality health care for all Americans and reduce the growth in health care spending, and for other purposes."

Clearly, there are more than a few "other purposes."

And, 1,501 pages later, the ending is not particularly explosive. Just some fairly indecipherable legalese setting forth the effective date of an obscure tax provision related to "loans for qualified investments in therapeutic discovery projects in lieu of tax credits."

We'd very much like to explain to you exactly what that means. But we have a little reading to do first.

Readers who search out provisions of interest in [the legislative text](#) and post salient comments or questions, will receive an official, time-stamped e-mail of gratitude, hand-typed by a member of The New York Times Capitol Hill bureau.

For those of you interested in tracking the bill's status, available through the [Library of](#)

Congress, the bill is now known as S. 1796, the America's Healthy Future Act.

Senate Democratic leaders are now working to combine the Finance Committee bill with the 839-page version of the health care legislation approved by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee back in July.

The Finance Committee typically acts on detailed summaries of bills written in plain English and leaves the drafting of legal text for later. That's what happened when the committee approved its bill last Tuesday — even though some Republicans on the panel had argued that the group should wait for the full legalese.

Once the two Senate bills are combined, the completed legislative language will allow the Congressional Budget Office to develop a more precise cost estimate of the legislation.