

The New York Times

Prescriptions

Making Sense of the Health Care Debate

December 16, 2009, 12:52 pm

A Read-Aloud in the Senate — Or Not

By [DAVID M. HERSZENHORN](#)

Update | 2:58 p.m. In a counter-maneuver to thwart an effort by Senate Republicans to stall the health care debate, Senator Bernard Sanders, independent of Vermont, has withdrawn his amendment that would create a fully government-run health care system.

The Republicans, engaging in parliamentary warfare, had been forcing the clerks to read the entire 767-page amendment. That move threatened to grind the Senate to a halt for the rest of the day, and perhaps longer.

Read the earlier version of this article below, published before Mr. Sanders withdrew the amendment:

At the start of the Senate floor debate over health care legislation last month, Republicans agreed to forgo a reading by the clerks of the entire 2,074-page bill submitted by the majority leader, Harry Reid of Nevada. The deal let lawmakers head home for the Thanksgiving holiday.

But acrimony has been building on the Senate floor as Democrats push toward a final vote on the legislation before Christmas. And on Wednesday, Republicans demanded that the clerks read the pending amendment – a 767-page proposal by Senator Bernard Sanders, independent of Vermont, to create a fully government-run health care system.

The Republicans oppose Mr. Sanders's amendment, which they generally regard as socialist. But the insistence on reading the amendment has more to do with the larger fight over Mr. Reid's bill.

The Democrats had been hoping to deal with a couple of health amendments on Wednesday, including the one proposed by Mr. Sanders, which was expected to be defeated, and then pause the health care debate to take up a defense spending bill.

But Senator Tom Coburn, Republican of Oklahoma, objected when Democrats suggested waiving the reading of the Sanders amendment.

“This throws the schedule off considerably,” a Republican leadership aide said, with no small amount of satisfaction.

Liberal supporters of a single-payer health care system may not be all that disappointed by the Republican tactics. Many of them have been complaining all year that the idea has not received sufficient attention.

If you would like to skip story hour and read the Sanders amendment on your own time, [click here](#).

And for more insight into many parliamentarian weapons members of Congress can wield thwart the opposition, see this recent Week in Review article, [“Thrust and Parry on the Senate Floor.”](#)