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## **Prescriptions**

**Making Sense of the Health Care Debate**

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### **Next Up: Harry Reid and the Blenders**

By [David M. Herszenhorn](#)

Ron Sachs/EPA Senator Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

So now what?

The Senate Finance Committee had barely voted on the big health care legislation when the infinitesimally short attention span of Capitol Hill shifted to the next step. And it sounds like the debut of a 1950s doo-wop band: Ladies and gentlemen, give it up for Harry Reid and the Bill Blenders.

That would be the majority leader, Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, and the team of senators, aides and White House officials who will meld the Finance Committee bill with an alternate version of the health care legislation approved back in July by the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee, known as HELP.

Mr. Reid will gather the group in his office on the second floor of the Capitol on Wednesday for its first official meeting. The group includes Senator Max Baucus, Democrat of Montana and the Finance Committee chairman; Senator Christopher J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, who was acting chairman of the HELP committee when it passed its health care bill; and representatives of the White House.

Jim Manley, a spokesman for Mr. Reid, said that Senator Olympia J. Snowe of Maine, the lone Republican on the Finance Committee to vote in favor of the bill, would be invited to future sessions. And Mr. Manley said the Democratic leader was prepared to go to substantial lengths to keep Ms. Snowe's support.

“He is prepared to do what he can to keep her on board while putting together a bill that can get the 60 votes necessary to overcome a Republican filibuster,” Mr. Manley

said.

Senate Democrats have already held some preliminary discussions about blending the two bills, and the White House lobbying team is already fully deployed across the Capitol.

The more liberal HELP bill was approved on a strict party-line vote, with Republicans unanimously opposed. And in many ways, it was only half of a bill, because the Finance Committee has jurisdiction over the tax provisions needed to finance the legislation, as well as spending on Medicare and Medicaid.

The HELP bill, for instance, anticipated a major expansion of Medicaid, the state-federal insurance program for the poor, but it is the Finance Committee bill that includes the expansion, which extends eligibility to all Americans earning less than 133 percent of the federal poverty level, including childless adults currently excluded.

Speaking of the other side of the Capitol, the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, continues to work on her own blending project, pulling together the bills reported out by three different committees into a single legislative proposal for full floor debate.

The House bill will include a government-run insurance plan, or public option, to compete with private insurers. But Mr. Reid, and perhaps President Obama himself, may have to mediate that issue in the Senate.

Liberal senators want the public option. But Ms. Snowe is firmly opposed. She has expressed openness to a compromise that would allow a government-run health plan to be “triggered” in states where the legislation otherwise does not succeed in providing affordable insurance.