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Unions Claim Health-Care Bill Would Hurt Members

Would Tax Many Plans
By ARI PAUL



RANDI WEINGARTEN: Sees 'tax on the middle class.'

A coalition of unions is opposing the U.S. Senate Finance Committee's health-care proposal because of the lack of a public option and a provision that would put a tax on families with generous employer-paid benefit plans, a move that could affect millions of union members.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and other unions launched an ad campaign calling the bill approved by the panel Oct. 13 deeply flawed, as it would tax health insurance plans valued at \$21,000 per year for a family, which would apply to nearly half of AFSCME's nationwide membership, according to union spokesman Chris Policano.

'Out of Reach' for Many

"The subsidies available in the bill's health insurance exchanges for the uninsured are inadequate, making the cost of health insurance out of reach for many families and individuals," American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said in a statement. "But affordability doesn't just affect the uninsured. It also affects the more-than 160 million workers and their families, who through negotiations or otherwise, have employer provided coverage. Over \$1,000 from the premium of each family plan—paid by employers and employees—actually subsidizes the cost of the uninsured. The Finance Committee's bill's health insurance tax increases will add to these costs and become, in effect, a tax on the middle class."

She also said, "The only way to truly reform our health-care system and strengthen our economy is to make health insurance affordable so it is accessible. The Finance Committee's failure to include a robust national public plan to provide competition to private insurers makes achieving this goal difficult, if not impossible."

Mr. Policano suggested that a better plan was for the Obama Administration to institute a more-progressive income tax system, and re-examine the tax cuts established under the Bush Administration.

"The wealthy got tax breaks under Bush valued over a trillion dollars," he said. "We think if some of those were rescinded you wouldn't be putting the burden of health-care reform on working families and middle-income folks."

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