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Union Members Exempted From 'Cadillac' Health Tax

Pressure Persuades White House
By ARI PAUL



GREGORY FLOYD: Wall Street gets loaf, we get crust.

A furious lobbying campaign by unions Jan. 14 persuaded President Obama and Democratic leaders in Congress to exempt health-plans that are part of collective-bargaining agreements from the so-called Cadillac Tax on more-generous plans until 2018.

Argued Inclusion Was Unjust

That move, which was viewed as a crucial step in getting a health-reform bill adopted, came after a series of meetings by national labor leaders at the White House and in Congress during which they argued that their members were being unjustly ensnared by the Cadillac Tax provision of a bill passed late last year by the Senate.

AFL-CIO President Richard L. Trumka, who led the charge against that provision being applied to union members, told the New York Times that labor would now put its full weight behind approval of a healthcare bill as a result of the agreement to postpone the applicability of the tax to those employees — which would kick in for individual plans worth at least \$8,900 and family plans worth \$24,000 — for eight years.

The unions had held a Jan. 13 national call-in day during which their rank and files e-mailed and called Congress Members to voice their objections to the 40-percent tax hit that would have been attached to the more-generous union plans.

'237' Head Cites Tradeoff

Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd said in an interview that the attractive health-benefit rights enjoyed by city workers had come as a result of accepting less-generous wage increases in collective bargaining.

"We've taken over the years less money in wages to have that benefit maintained, and that's part of our compensation package," he said.

The Teamster leader added that the burden of health-care reform and economic recovery should not be put on middle-class union members, but rather on the wealthiest taxpayers.

"Wall Street and big corporations have the rest of the loaf at the top and they're throwing out a piece of bread for the rest of us to fight over," Mr. Floyd said. "Most of the burden during this economic crisis is being put on the middle class, which it always is, but you would for once like to see some of the pain shared. And the middle class is going to implode if we don't have some relief."



RICHARD TRUMKA: Senate version punitive.

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During a speech that day to the National Press Club in Washington, Mr. Trumka expressed a strong preference for the health-care proposal approved by the House of Representatives, which he said “asks the small part of our country that has prospered in the last decade—the richest of the rich—to pay a little bit more in taxes so that most Americans can have health insurance.”

He noted that bill also “reins in the power of health insurers and employers by having an employer mandate and a strong public option.”

In contrast, he said, “The tax on benefits in the Senate bill pits working Americans who need health care for their families against working Americans struggling to keep health care for their families. This is a policy designed to benefit elites—in this case, insurers, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies and irresponsible employers—at the expense of the broader public.”

As this newspaper went to press Jan. 15, Congressional Democrats were working to reconcile other differences between the House and Senate bills. They hoped to pass a single health-care reform bill prior to the President’s State of the Union address next month.

Unions like the Teamsters supported President Obama during the 2008 election believing that his health-care and financial reforms would benefit members, in addition to his support for the Employee Free Choice Act, which would make it easier for workers to form unions.



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