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Health Care Update

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Is the public option back? Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi thinks she has the requisite 218 votes in her chamber and increasingly it looks like some compromise version of a public option, most likely with a trigger, will pass muster in the Senate. Still, it is strange the way the public option has become so defining an issue in the health care debate.

Perhaps "strange" is not the right word. The public option, which is not the most central feature of any of the five bills that have passed committees, became the point of Republican attack because they could say it amounted to a government take-over. They overlooked the word "option" in "public option." President Obama, wanting to appear conciliatory and bi-partisan said that the public option was not essential to achieving his goals for health care reform. Then the Left went ballistic and shouted in unison at the White House the famous words Margaret Thatcher once spoke to George H. W. Bush: "Don't go wobbly on us." Voila ? the public option became the central point of controversy in an already controversial legislative debate.

Our system of government is designed, in part, to adjudicate interests and to facilitate compromise. That is why the public option should never have been a deal-breaker for either side, except of course for the rejectionist wing of the GOP that would oppose Obama if he said he thinks the sun rises in the East.

The abortion battle, where compromise is far more difficult, now looms over the health care reform debate. Where to reach compromise? No abortion coverage in any public option. No direct federal subsidies for private policies that cover abortion. If people can deduct some or all of their health care premiums, and get a tax break, that is not federal funding of abortion. It is always easy to see when federal funding occurs. The check is marked "U.S. Treasury." We will see if the Congress can reach a compromise between the Stupak and Capps amendments. It is never easy to draw such lines, but they

must be drawn.

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