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The Compromise in the Senate

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The focus of many Catholics has been on the debate over abortion coverage in the new health care reform bill. But, with the failure of the Nelson-Hatch amendment yesterday, that debate goes behind closed doors, either in the Senate or in the Conference Committee that will meet to reconcile the Senate bill with the one passed in the House earlier. Moving to the forefront of the public debate is a new compromise worked out by a group of moderate and liberal Democratic senators about the role of a public option in the reforms.

Essentially, the Senate is poised to set up something akin to the Federal employees health benefits system. The government will assemble a range of private and non-profit plans, negotiating with the insurance companies to lower costs. This is not the full-throttled public option that liberals sought. In exchange for their support, moderates agreed to allow people over 55 to buy-in to Medicare, which is a government-run program but one which Republicans have a hard time attacking because it is very popular with voters.

The compromise should be embraced and shows why in the legislative business you never give up hope that some new ideas might break an impasse. That lesson in how you legislate should now inform the approach of pro-life and pro-choice advocates towards achieving language both sides can live with on abortion.

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