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# Senate Health Bill Is Outlined by Reid

By [GREG HITT](#) and [JANET ADAMY](#)

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid outlined for Democrats Wednesday a ten-year \$849 billion bill that would overhaul the nation's health-care system and extend insurance to 31 million Americans without coverage.

The legislation represents the Nevada Democrat's first attempt to build consensus among Senate Democratic liberals and centrists, as well as the two independents allied with the party.

A senior Senate Democratic leadership aide said the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated the bill, after it is implemented, would ensure that 94% of those living in the U.S., not counting unauthorized immigrants, have insurance coverage. CBO has previously estimated that about 83% of Americans now have insurance.

The aide said the CBO estimated that the Senate measure would reduce the federal budget deficit by \$127 billion over the next decade, and by \$650 billion over the second ten years of the program. In part, the bill achieves that reduction through new taxes on Medicare and high-value insurance plans.

The 10-year price tag comes in below the \$900 billion limit set by the White House and below the \$1.055 trillion cost of the health-overhaul passed by the House earlier this month.

The \$849 billion figure and the prospect of deficit reduction cheered Democrats. But the figures aren't likely to win over Republicans, who say the bill adds costly new benefits for some Americans when the federal budget deficit is reaching new heights.

"We're going to do everything we can to defeat this monstrosity," said Sen. John Thune (R., S.D.).

Among other things, the Senate legislation would create a new government-run health insurance plan to compete with private insurers, while allowing states the option not to participate. That is a nod to centrists worried about the federal government's growing footprint in the private sector.

The bill would also create government subsidies to help individuals and families comply with a mandate to buy insurance, and would sharply expand Medicaid, the federal-state health insurance program for the poor.

Mr. Reid's decision to unveil a bill sets the stage for a pivotal vote, perhaps Friday or Saturday, that

will determine whether the Senate can formally open debate on the bill. Mr. Reid, who met Wednesday with Vice President Joseph Biden, has voiced optimism that he can secure the votes needed to overcome Republican opposition and move to the debate. But with the outcome uncertain, the coming vote looms large as the first of several over the next month that will test Mr. Reid's ability to hold together liberals and centrists.

One swing Democrat, Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, suggested he might be willing to begin debate. "If you don't like the bill, then why would you block your own opportunity to amend it?" he said.

If the legislation clears this week's hurdles, a month of debate likely looms in December, with Republicans vowing to take advantage of every opportunity to slow the process. Senate Republicans said Democrats are trying to rush action on the bill before the American public, already uneasy, turns completely against the White House-backed initiative.

On the floor, there could be at least a half-dozen points where Republicans -- if they use every stalling tactic available -- could force Mr. Reid to muster 60 votes to move the bill along, said congressional aides.

Mr. Reid's bill includes a series of trade-offs designed to reflect the sometimes conflicting interests of those in his party. He decided to pare back a proposed tax on high-value insurance plans, bowing to liberal and union complaints that the measure would hit middle-class families. To make up for the lost revenue, he inserted a provision that would raise Medicare payroll taxes on couples who make more than \$250,000 a year, said people familiar with the legislation.

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