

## **Senate Finance Committee approves reform bill**

From *Modern Healthcare*:

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The Senate Finance Committee voted 14-9 to approve a sweeping, \$829 billion overhaul of the U.S. healthcare system, with only one Republican joining all 13 Democrats to advance the measure.

The bill requires almost all U.S. residents to buy some level of health insurance, offering \$461 billion in federal subsidies to help them do so. It also expands Medicaid eligibility to those making 133% of the federal poverty level, or roughly \$29,327 for a family of four.

Additionally, the legislation also cuts Medicare payments to almost every type of provider while it establishes a number of pilot programs to help better coordinate care and boost its quality. The bill would also replace a scheduled 21% physician pay cut with a 0.5% increase in 2010. It doesn't, however, include a national public health plan. Instead, it would create health insurance "cooperatives," which could recruit members to help negotiate better rates with private health plans.

Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine was the only Republican to vote for the package, though she did so with a caveat. "My vote today is my vote today," she said. "It doesn't forecast what my vote will be tomorrow."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and a small team of other Senate leaders will now try to meld the finance committee's bill with one approved by another Senate committee this summer.