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The Salt Lake Tribune

MONDAY, November 9, 2009

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Utah's Democrat will vote 'no' on health reform bill

Politics » Utah's lone Democrat in Congress will vote 'no.'

By **Matt Canham**
The Salt Lake Tribune

Updated: 11/07/2009 12:35:06 PM MST

Democratic leaders remain confident the House will approve their health reform bill as early as today, but they'll have to do it without any support from Utah's three congressmen.

Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, announced Friday that he will vote against his party's sweeping \$1 trillion package that seeks to insure almost every American while reducing long-term medical costs.

Utah's two Republican members, Reps. Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz, have long opposed the bill, but Matheson remained mum until Friday, when he decided the House version would simply cost too much and reform too little.

"Putting millions of additional people into a broken system will not work," Matheson said in announcing his vote. "I do not believe that this bill makes the system reforms needed to ensure financial stability for our families, our businesses and our federal treasury."

He noted the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has determined the House version would increase federal spending and the percentage of the budget committed to health care. Instead he favors a still-expansive, yet cheaper, version created by the Senate Finance Committee. Senate leaders are still drafting their health reform proposal, which will combine that finance committee version with one that came out of the health committee.

Matheson, a conservative Democrat and a leading member of the Blue Dog Democratic Caucus, used recent Republican talking points in explaining his

opposition to the House reform bill.

"A one-size-fits all, nationally run plan that doesn't acknowledge the different health demographics in the states isn't the answer," he said.

Matheson made his announcement a few hours before the House Rules Committee rejected his five proposed amendments. In a raucous meeting, rife with partisan jabs, the committee refused to allow debate on any amendment offered by either party, though it agreed to strengthen provisions meant to restrict federal funds from paying for elective abortions.

The committee also agreed to allow Republicans to offer an alternative bill during the debate now slated for today.

In one amendment, Matheson sought to kill a government-created insurance plan meant to compete against private insurance companies. He wanted to replace a so-called "public option" with

health care co-ops created in each state.

In other amendments, Matheson would have imposed caps on jury awards for some medical malpractice claims, allowed states to create online insurance marketplaces instead of the federal government, bolstered health savings accounts and created a loan-forgiveness program for some pediatric specialists.

Conservative groups have targeted Matheson as a key vote in their bid to derail the Democratic bill, which is President Barack Obama's top domestic priority.

Others, such as the Utah Health Policy Project, have urged Matheson to vote for the proposal despite his reservations in order to keep the bill moving forward.

Matheson has predicted that a health reform bill will ultimately pass and on Friday he called health care reform "a moral and a fiscal necessity."

"I believe that everyone in this country should have access to quality, affordable health care," he said.

But he was one of only a handful of Democrats who opposed health reform in the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and he is expected to be one of a few dozen to vote against the bill on the House floor.

Matheson may have to cast one more vote on health reform before it is all over and he has left open the

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Utah Congressman Jim Matheson gives his acceptance speech at... (Trent Nelson/The Salt Lake Tribune)

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possibility of switching from a "no" to a "yes."

If both the House and Senate pass their own version of reform, congressional leaders would combine the bills into a final product, requiring one last vote in each body.

No matter if it is a committee vote, a floor vote or the final vote, Utah's four Republican members of Congress stand staunchly opposed to the Democratic proposals.

No Republican member of the House is expected to vote for the bill today.

They say the Democratic approach would rely too much on the federal government and would raise money by levying new fees and taxes on families, businesses and whole industries.

"We need health care reform, but this is the wrong bill at the wrong time," Chaffetz said on the House floor on Friday.

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Dems aim for vote

Democrats were close to adopting compromise language on the politically treacherous issue of insurance coverage for abortions. Party leaders were confident they had the votes needed to pass the bill. > **A8**

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