

SNOWE STATEMENT ON SENATE HEALTH REFORM DEBATE VOTE

December 20, 2009

Washington, D.C. -

U.S. Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) released the following statement today on the status of the health reform legislation currently pending before the United States Senate:

Having been fully immersed in this issue for this entire year and as the only Republican to vote for health reform in the Finance Committee, I deeply regret that I cannot support the pending Senate legislation as it currently stands, given my continued concerns with the measure and an artificial and arbitrary deadline of completing the bill before Christmas that is shortchanging the process on this monumental and trans-generational effort.

Only three weeks ago the Senate received a more than 2,000 page bill on one of the most complex issues in our history, and we have since considered fewer than two dozen amendments out of more than 450 filed. A little over 24 hours ago, the Senate received a final, nearly 400 page manager's amendment that cannot be changed or altered, with more than 500 cross references including to other statutes and will be voted on at 1 am Monday morning. It defies logic that we are now expected to vote on the overall, final package before Christmas with no opportunity to amend it so we can adjourn for a three week recess even as the legislation will not fully go into effect until 2014, four years from now.

I remain convinced we must work toward a responsible, common sense solution to reverse the trend of spiraling health care costs -- that will cause one-in-four Americans this year to have either inadequate coverage or none at all, and threatens affordable coverage for millions more Americans in the future. As I pledged to the President in an Oval Office meeting Saturday afternoon, I couldn't agree more that reform is an imperative, and I will continue my constructive efforts to forge effective, common sense health care reform as the process moves into a House-Senate conference.

The reality that the status quo is unacceptable is what originally brought six of us together on the Senate Finance Committee this summer in the only bipartisan effort in any committee of the House or Senate in the so-called Group of Six, convened by Chairman Max Baucus. We met 31 times, week after week for over four months, to debate policy and not politics.

Two months ago, when I voted for the Finance Committee bill, I said that the process moving forward shouldn't be about vote counting, but rather crafting the right policy and that the credibility of the process would determine the credibility of the outcome. So I was troubled that when the Finance bill was melded with the measure reported by the Senate HELP committee it was without the more inclusive, collaborative process I'd participated in up to that point and instead it was done in the shadows, without transparency, just to garner the necessary 60 votes and nothing more.

This bill has taken a dramatically different direction since the Finance Committee bill -- it is now 1,200 pages longer and includes a new employer mandate that could annihilate the job growth

potential that is so vital to our economic recovery. As the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council has stated, this mandate “will only burden firms with more costs and red tape which means they will not grow, invest, or create jobs.”

This bill also creates the CLASS Act on long term care insurance, a brand new program which the Medicare Actuary has said is projected to go into the red just five years after it begins paying out benefits. And the legislation requires a \$90 billion increase in Medicare payroll taxes – a provision that was not part of the bill I voted for in Finance Committee – that predominately affects the self-employed and the very same small business owners we are counting on to create new jobs and lead us out of this recession. And that’s just to name a few of the vital issues.

Furthermore, we still don’t have answers to some of the most fundamental questions that people will be asking at their kitchen tables. These are the critical questions relevant to peoples’ daily lives, such as, what does this mean for me? How much will my health insurance plan cost? How much will my deductible or my co-pay be? How much am I going to have to pay out of pocket? Not one single member in Congress – Republican or Democrat – can answer those questions, and that is why I wrote to the Congressional Budget Office on December 3rd requesting a complete analysis of these and other key issues as it is imperative that we have those answers before proceeding.

Ultimately, there is absolutely no reason to be hurtling headlong to a Christmas deadline on monumental legislation affecting every American, when it doesn’t even fully go into effect until 2014. When 51 percent of the American people in a recent survey have said they do not approve of what we are doing, they understand what Congress does not -- and that is, that time is not our enemy, it is our friend. Therefore, we must take a time out from this legislative game of “beat the clock”, reconvene in January – instead of taking a three week recess – and spend the time necessary to get this right. Legislation affecting more than 300 million Americans deserves better than midnight votes on a bill that cannot be further amended and that no one has had the opportunity to fully consider – and the Senate must step up to its responsibility as the world’s greatest deliberative body on behalf of the American people.”

(This text was copied and reformatted from <http://snowe.senate.gov/public/>, specifically: http://snowe.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressRoom.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=addfd8be-802a-23ad-48c9-e50f85c61537&IsPrint=true.)