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SENATE REPUBLICANS HIT INTO TRIPLE PLAY -- ACA REPEAL/REPLACE/DELAY EFFORTS COLLAPSE IN DRAMATIC FASHION

Isn't it amazing how motivated the U.S. Senate can be to pass some kind of health reform measure when the alternative is to give up the first two weeks of its five week summer recess to get health reform done?

Nonetheless, after barely managing to bring the health reform debate to the Senate floor early this week, Senate Republicans promptly failed to advance three health reform measures: Repeal and Replace, Repeal and Delay and the so-called Skinny Plan. Each time Republicans were thwarted by members of their own party – like hitting into a triple play.

SKINNY PLAN NARROWLY DEFEATED . . . BY THREE REPUBLICANS

Early this morning the Senate came up just one vote short of passing the so-called “Skinny Plan”. The vote took place about 2 AM this morning but the 49 to 51 tally ended Republican health reform efforts in dramatic fashion. Senator John McCain of Arizona cast the 3rd “No” vote. The bill was subsequently pulled from the floor.

The singular purpose of the Skinny Plan was to allow the Senate to pass something -- anything -- with the intent that the Skinny Plan would become part of some other revised, compromise bill to be negotiated with the House in conference committee and hopefully approved by both houses of Congress.

THE SENATE DEBATE THAT ALMOST WASN'T

The Senate struggled to even open the healthcare debate on the Senate floor. On Tuesday, July 25, Vice President Mike Pence broke a 50 – 50 tie to pass a procedural motion bringing the Better Care Reconciliation Act of 2017 (BCRA) to the floor for debate. Two Republican Senators broke rank and voted with all 48 Democrats.

THE BCRA (REPEAL AND REPLACE) FAILED TO ADVANCE

Only hours after approving the motion to bring the BCRA to the Senate floor for debate, the Senate failed to pass the BCRA by a vote of 43 to 57. Nine Republican Senators joined all 48 democrats to vote down the repeal and replace measure.

STRAIGHT REPEAL AND DELAY ALSO FAILED TO ADVANCE

On Wednesday, June 26, the Senate considered and then rejected the very same repeal and delay bill passed 18 months ago and later vetoed by President Obama. The vote was 45 to 55. This bill was a straight repeal of the ACA with no immediate replacement, but with a two year delay implementing the repeal. Seven Republican Senators joined with all 48 Democrats to sink the bill. Of these seven Republican Senators, six had previously voted for the same bill in December 2015.

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It is not clear where health reform will go from here. In addition the need to address budget issues by October 1st and comprehensive federal tax reform has become increasingly urgent. Democrats are now calling for a bipartisan debate on how to fix the ACA (which is still the law of the land).

One item of note: The *Washington Examiner* is reporting that, according to Rep. Mark Meadows [R-NC], a new effort is underway to write a bill that can pass the Senate with 51 votes and will include health reform proposals previously offered by Senators Lindsey Graham, Bill Cassidy, Ted Cruz, and Rob Portman.

Here we go again. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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