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Senate GOP blocks Medicare Part D negotiation bill

By Klaus Marre
April 18, 2007

Senate Republicans Wednesday blocked legislation that would allow the government to negotiate drug prices for the Medicare prescription drug benefit.

Democrats fell four votes short of the required 60 to invoke cloture. Six Republicans, Sens. Norm Coleman (Minn.), Susan Collins (Maine), Chuck Hagel (Neb.), Gordon Smith (Ore.), Olympia Snowe (Maine) and Arlen Specter (Pa.), crossed party lines.

In the end, the vote was 55–42 after Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) sided with the Republicans for procedural reasons. Sens. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) did not vote.

The bill would have lifted a prohibition on such negotiations and opened the door to allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to make deals with the pharmaceutical industry.

The House passed a stronger version of the legislation earlier this year, which would have made such negotiations mandatory. The White House said Bush would veto either version of the bill.

Republicans hailed the vote as a victory for seniors.

“Today the Senate protected healthcare access for tens of millions of seniors as well as price negotiations to ensure they pay the least amount of money for the prescription drugs they need,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said.

He added that the bill would do “nothing” to provide seniors with a better drug benefit.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) Tuesday predicted the cloture motion would fail, citing the influence of the pharmaceutical and insurance industries.

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