

Ex-Senate Leaders to Unveil Health Care Compromise

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Trying to prevent a repeat of the 1990s standoff over health care, three former Senate leaders are unveiling a plan Wednesday that combines ideas from both political parties to guarantee coverage for all without adding to the deficit.

Democrat Tom Daschle is joining Republicans Bob Dole and Howard Baker to release a \$1.2 trillion proposal that would be fully paid for with a combination of spending cuts and tax increases.

A summary of the plan calls for an individual requirement to carry health insurance, an idea that many Republicans support. But it would also impose new levies on large companies that don't provide coverage to their workers, an approach preferred by Democrats.

Perhaps the most controversial part calls for taxing health insurance benefits worth more than the value of the coverage that members of Congress get.

Republicans have supported such an approach, arguing it would encourage people to switch to less expensive insurance plans, and that might cut overall costs in the long run. But unions, a major Democratic constituency, are adamantly opposed.

On another hot issue, the proposal would leave it up to the states to create publicly sponsored insurance plans that would compete with private insurers.

The former leaders acknowledged they don't have to answer to voters or worry about interest groups any longer. But they said health care is too important an issue to get dragged down again by partisan political warfare.

The last major effort to revamp the health care system to guarantee coverage and control costs ended in frustration 15 years ago, when President Bill Clinton's plan failed to win support in Congress.

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