

Goodies For Labor Tucked Away in Health Bill

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Now that the U.S. House of Representatives has passed its version of a health care reform bill, all eyes turn to the Senate. No matter where you stand in the debate over issues such as the public option, big labor bosses hope you do not notice some lower-profile provisions tucked into the pages of this massive proposal. If they become law, these provisions would give union leaders considerable influence over health care decisions affecting us all.

The unions' path to this point has been interesting. When the public recognized that the Employee Free Choice Act (the card check bill) was not a good idea, labor leaders turned to some old-fashioned misdirection tactics. While higher-profile aspects of health care reform drew attention, pro-union legislators slipped a variety of big benefits for labor into the proposed legislation. Quietly tucked among the proposals' thousands of pages, these provisions have avoided much scrutiny.

These features all encourage more unionization. The unions know that under Canada's nationalized system, union membership among all health care workers is 61 percent, compared to just 11 percent in the U.S. Increasing membership similarly in this country would swell labor's coffers with as much as another \$2 billion in dues.

If our elected representatives are serious about health care reform, they should address the pertinent issues, without slipping in hidden favors for their political supporters. Big labor's self-serving, sleight-of-hand tactics have no place in this vital debate.

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Related People





A. Kevin Troutman

Senior Counsel

713.292.5602

Email