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TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."



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TRANSCRIPT

SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, is there or isn't there a deal in the works for health care reform, is it all falling apart.

Senator Harry Reid announced a tentative deal last week that eliminates the so-called public option and adds an expansion of Medicare. But by Friday it seemed the wheels were coming off that deal, too--are there sixty votes in the Senate for it, will President Obama get a bill before Christmas, or should he do what some Republicans want--just stop and start over.

We'll hear from all sides. Democratic Senators Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, and the minority leader of the Senate Republican Mitch McConnell.

I'll have a final word on Tiger tales.

But first, saving health care reform on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And good morning, again.

All of our senators are in the studio this morning. We're going to start with the Democrats. Senator McConnell will be along in just a bit.

Last Week ten senators, including Senators Nelson and Rockefeller, who are with us this morning, came up with a health reform plan to replace the plan that included the so-called public option. That is a government-run health insurance program like Medicare. It would do that by setting up insurance plans run by nonprofit companies which would be supervised by the government and it would allow people with no insurance to buy into Medicare beginning at age fifty-five.

But now those negotiations which seemed to be going pretty well last week, at midweek, seemed to grind to a halt on Friday. So are we back to square one, Senator Rockefeller?

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER (D-West Virginia/Finance Committee): No, we are not. In fact, I think we're the-- we have tremendous momentum. I've always believed that-- Bob, that as you come closer to taking a vote that you have to look at this most important piece of legislation since Social Security.

And you-- you-- you have to look at the whole thing. It gets harder and harder to stick on one individual subject and say I don't like that. Therefore, I'm going to vote against the bill. I actually think that we're-- that the momentum is building and that our chances of working well are increasing.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Really?

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: And just to give you an example, Joe Lieberman and I are working together on a-- a Medicare-controlled cost factor.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Mm-Hm.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: Ben Nelson and I are working together on health insurance reform, and I'm really proud of that. And I think that's symbolic.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just ask Senator Nelson. Do you agree with that, Senator?

SENATOR BEN NELSON (D-Nebraska): Well, I-- I think I can-- I can say this that the-- there have been so many improvements to the legislation now that, perhaps, it is easier for some. I still have the unique issue of abortion and while we're going to continue to work together on health insurance reforms, I-- I want to make certain that at the end of the day, whatever we do is the best bill that-- that-- that can be possibly put together.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let me-- let me just cut to the chase here. If this bill, as the wording on abortion in it now stands, can you vote for it?

SENATOR BEN NELSON: I said I can't support the bill the-- with the-- the abortion language that's there. Unfortunately the Nelson-Hatch--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Amendment failed.

SENATOR BEN NELSON: -- Casey failed and-- but I do know that there are some who are-- who are right now trying to find language that might be compatible with the Stupak language in the House. That's a tall order for people and I'm not prescribing ahead what they may be able to do.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask you this, Senator Nelson, because Senator Rockefeller here seems to be pretty optimistic. You were one of the senators along with Senator Rockefeller who worked out this compromise--

SENATOR BEN NELSON: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --proposal. By working out this proposal, did that mean that you can vote for this proposal?

SENATOR BEN NELSON: Well, no-- I-- I think there's-- it's important to point out that what we put together was something to get scored where the financial analysis of the CBO--

BOB SCHIEFFER: In other words, you voted for something to send it to the Congressional Budget Office to find out how much it would cost.

SENATOR BEN NELSON: Well, I think-- I think we all did. I-- I know that there are those who want to vote for this, but I've withheld my-- my decision on that until you see the numbers and see how it all works.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): So--

SENATOR BEN NELSON: And there are some concerns, of course.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So-- so, you're not saying you can vote for this. You're just saying you worked on this proposal to see how much it would cost.

SENATOR BEN NELSON: I want to be a friend of the process and-- and the bill that originally was there was-- was something I could not support. But I've always felt obliged to try to make something better rather than obstruct and that's what I've been attempting to do.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Why, Senator Lieberman, does nobody really know what's in this bill? I mean I-- I was watching the Senate debate the other day.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN (I-Connecticut): Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Senator McCain got up on the floor and said he couldn't find out exactly what was in the bill. And Senator Durbin, who is one of the-- is part of the leadership of the Democratic Party, responded. And I want to put these words up on the screen.

He said, "I would say to the Senator from Arizona that I am in the dark almost as much as he is. And I am in the leadership."

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Why is it nobody knows what this proposal is that was sent for--

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah. Let me just think, right-- a very--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --for to the Congressional Budget Office?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: --correct. A very important question, right.

On the basic bill, about two thousand pages, we all know what's in it. But on this-- on these compromises which my friends tell me were really not agreed on, as Ben said, but just they agree that they were interesting enough to send to get analyzed by the Budget Office.

Senator Reid has decided that if you let them out they'll get mauled (LAUGHING). And it puts us all in a very difficult position because we don't know exactly what's in them. But I will tell you that on one part of it the so-called Medicare buy-in, the opposition to it has been growing as the week has gone on. And-- and though I don't know exactly what's in it, from what I hear I certainly would have a hard time voting for it because it has some of the same infirmities that the public option did. It-- it will add taxpayer cost. It will add to the deficit. It's unnecessary.

The basic bill which is a-- has a lot of good things in it provides a generous new system of subsidies for people between ages fifty-five and sixty-five and choice and competition. So, you know, Bob, I think we're at a-- there're-- there're not sixty votes for health care reform in the Senate now. We're at a point where and-- and yet the basis of the bill, covering thirty million people can't buy insurance today, regulating insurance companies so they treat consumers more fairly, for instance not denying them health care.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So you can't vote for the bill right--

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --now. You can't vote--

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --for the bill right now. So why do you think that it is going to pass, Senator Rockefeller? Because we know that is going to be one or two votes here.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: I know that.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Little.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: And the reason that it has to be sixty votes, the reason it's so difficult is because every single Democrat and Independent has to vote for it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm-Hm.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: You see? Because the Republicans are withholding all of their votes.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yes.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: They have been throughout the entire process. And that has to be said to the American people. I mean it's very hard to pass a bill under any circumstances. But when everything is filibustered you have to get sixty votes, it's very, very hard.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Bob, let me--

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: I feel that-- I feel that way--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: --that it can pass or will pass because, as I say, I think the closer you get, the more you have to look at the whole bill, the more likely you are to say, I have to do this for the nation.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Bob, as I was saying there's a good basic bill in here and-- and the parts of it can be supported by sixty senators, including some Republicans, but we've got to stop adding to the bill. We got to start subtracting some controversial things. I think the only way to get this done before Christmas is to bring in some Republicans who are open-minded on this like Olympia Snowe. I'll tell you if--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, what do you have to do to do that?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: You got to take out the Medicare buy-in. You got to forget about the public option. You probably have to take out the CLASS Act, which was a whole new entitlement program that will in-- in future years put us further into deficit. And you got to adopt some of the cost containment provisions that will strengthen cost containment that all of us favor. If you did that, you'd have an enormous accomplishment. Thirty million Americans who can't afford insurance today would get it. Insurance companies out to be more aggressively regulated and costs would be bent down. So it's time to get reasonable.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, what about that, Senator Nelson?

SENATOR BEN NELSON: Well, I think every piece of landmark legislation has had bipartisan support. In many cases, two-thirds or more of the Senate voting for that legislation. That's one of the things that is missing right now. It's not easy to reach across the aisle under the circumstances we find ourselves, highly politicized—

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Why do--

SENATOR BEN NELSON: --very partisan.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --why do you think it's a bad idea to add this buy-in to Medicare, to let younger people buy into this program, Senator Nelson?

SENATOR BEN NELSON: Well, first of all, we don't know what the numbers are yet, Bob, and so that-- that's-- that's a (sic) important question.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You don't know what it's going to cost.

SENATOR BEN NELSON: We don't know what it's going to cost. The second thing is I'm concerned that it's-- it's the forerunner of single-payer, the ultimate singer-- single-payer plan, maybe even more directly than the public option.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Senator Rockefeller?

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: I-- I don't agree. Well, first of all, I introduced the original public option bill into the Senate with a Medicare benchmark because that would have saved fifty billion dollars. I tried to do it in the Finance Committee. They wouldn't listen. I tried to do it in-- in the little meetings--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm-Hm.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: --it just wasn't-- it wasn't advancing. So--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm-Hm.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: --I have a decision to make. I mean, I think the public option is a fundamentally correct way to provide competition. I don't think it's a slippery slope to single-payer system at all. I just think it's a very good ways (sic) of nonprofit. They don't have to make any money. But my-- my decision is this. Am I going to say-- if the public option doesn't come through, am I going to say, well, count me out? Or am I going to say, you know what, if we are creative and think of other forms of--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm-Hm.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: --dealing with the health insurance industry, which is public enemy number one as far as I'm concerned in terms of the American people--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, would you be willing—

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: --that-- that's my option. You see, that's what I want to do.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --would you be willing to vote for health care legislation that did not have the public option and-- and-- and did not have this buy-in to Medicare which seems to be a nonstarter for these two Senators--

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: Well, I'm very--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --who are right here.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: --I'm very much for the buy-in because that's thirty-million-plus Americans. Only four million and four million of them have no health insurance at all.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But would you vote for health care reform if that was not a part of it?

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: I'd-- I'd have to look at the whole thing. You see, I don't like the question, if this were not a part of it. It is a very important, very huge project. And I have to look at the whole thing. So I'm not going to get trapped by an individual, let's say something I have fought for and I didn't win.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do either of you think this can pass with the buy-in to Medicare in it and-- or-- or a public option?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: No. No. There are not sixty votes for that because the-- the bill itself does a lot to bring thirty million people into the system. We don't need to keep adding on to the back of this horse because we're going to break the horse's back and get nothing done. I-- I want to tell you, we could pass a health care reform bill this week with more than sixty votes and it would be bipartisan if we just took a few things out of the bill as it is today.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Give-- give it, we have just a short time. Give me that list of things that have to be taken out to pass it.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Well, from my point of view, no public option, no Medicare buy-in, CLASS Act which will add to our debt in the future. Don't take much more than that—

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): And Senator also--

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: --you got a great bill left.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --you'd have-- you'd have to change the language on abortion for you---

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

SENATOR BEN NELSON: Exactly.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --to vote for it.

SENATOR BEN NELSON: Exactly.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Senator Rockefeller, it's hard for me to think that your optimism is going to prevail here when you hear the statements that these two Senators--

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: I know.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --make.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: --and they're both very good friends. We're both working on parts-- major parts of the bill together.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yes.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: And it's not hard for me to feel optimistic.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: I do.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We're out of time.

SENATOR JAY ROCKEFELLER: Because history calls on us.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We're out of time. Thank you very much.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Thank you, Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We'll get the Republican side of this in one minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with yet another view on health care. The Republican leader in the Senate, Mitch McConnell. Senator, thank you for coming this morning.

You heard what these two Democratic senators, Senator Nelson and Senator Lieberman just said. They said if you took out the Medicare buy-in proposal, if you took out the so-called class action proposal, and Senator Nelson says if you change the language on abortion, you could get more than sixty votes, and you'd get some Republicans. Are they right?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL (R-Kentucky/Republican Leader): Well, it's noteworthy that you had to have three Democrats on to explain the Democratic position. In fact, there are more Democratic positions than you'd find in a stack of newspapers, and therein lies the problem. And let's just talk about the core of the issue here. The American people are saying "Please don't pass this." Your own CBS poll indicated opposition. The CNN poll said sixty-one percent were opposed and only thirty-six percent in favor. The government's actuary data at the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (sic) said that it will drive up health care costs by a quarter of a trillion dollars.

Republicans uniformly, without exception, believe that cutting a half a trillion dollars out of Medicare, raising four hundred billion dollars in new taxes, and providing the increase, the actual increase in health insurance premiums for everybody else, is not reform. So you can see why, Bob, the Democrats are deeply divided. I doubt if those adjustments that were suggested by my three colleagues representing three different points of view about this bill right before me would get there. I think they're in serious trouble on this and the core problem is the American people do not want us to pass it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, I mean-- but that's just-- I mean it's a hypothetical question obviously--

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL (overlapping): Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --but do you think that that would attract some Republican votes if they would do what Senator Lieberman says?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: No. You still-- there are two Democrats, one of whom is here and one of whom is not here who've been voting with us against the Medicare cuts. Senator Ben Nelson has also objected to the half a trillion dollars in Medicare cost-- cuts. Senator Jim Webb of Virginia has objected to the half a trillion dollars in Medicare cuts. So even if you were able to fix these peripheral matters that-- that you all were discussing, you still have the heart of the bill, Bob, which has a half a trillion dollars in Medicare cuts that Ben Nelson voted against those cuts and Jim Webb voted against those cuts.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Give me your-- your version of why this buy-in to Medicare is not a good idea.

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Well, Medicare is already unsustainable now. It's gone broke in seven years. Under the Reid bill, it's being used as a piggyback, a piggyback. They're taking a half a trillion dollars out of Medicare not to make it more sustainable but to start a whole new entitlement program for a different set of Americans.

And the Medicare buy-in would create even more problems because everyone anticipates a lot of very sick people would buy and it would exacerbate the problems that Medicare has and it's already unsustainable before you even get to this bill that has been styled health care reform. What we really need to do is to stop and start over and go step by step to deal with the cost issue, which is what the American people thought this was all about.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me just put up on the screen here what the chairman of the Republican Party Michael Steele said the other day.

He said "Democrats have accused us of trying to delay, stall, slow down, and ultimately stop them from experimenting on our nation's-- nation's health care. They are right. We do want to delay, stall, slow down, and ultimately stop them from experimenting on our nation's health care. And guess what, so do a majority of Americans." Is that your position as well?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Well, I think that it's clear that the American people do not want us to pass this twenty-one-hundred-page bill that-- that seeks to restructure one-sixth of our economy. But the Democrats have sixty people in their conference in the Senate. They could do anything they wanted to, Bob. You had three different points of view right here around this table a few minutes ago. That's the problem. They can't get together themselves.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think no health care reform would be better than what the Democrats are proposing?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: I'm not in favor of no health care reform. I think we ought to go step by step to fix the cost problem, target junk lawsuits against doctors and hospitals, have interstate competition among health insurance companies, incentivize wellness programs that the companies like Safeway have shown can bring down the cost.

There are things we can do to improve what is already the finest health care in the world.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think you can keep your caucus together here on this?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Republicans do not think a half a trillion dollars in Medicare cuts, four hundred billion dollars in new taxes and harsh insurance premiums for everyone else is reform. We want to reform the health care system. We do not believe this bill--this twenty-one-hundred-page monstrosity--is health care reform.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You've been getting a little heat yourself on this--

(Senator Mitch McConnell laughing)

BOB SCHIEFFER: --from some Republicans. I noticed that last week Rush Limbaugh was really on your case. He says you're not putting up enough of a fight. He says you're helping the Democrats by letting this debate go on.

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Look, the Republicans are together. Republicans who have a vote on this issue in the Senate are together. We all would like to see health care reform.

We do not think this twenty-one-hundred-page bill with its half a trillion dollars in Medicare cuts, its four hundred billion dollars in new taxes, and its higher insurance premiums is the direction we ought to go, we ought to--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): He thinks you ought to use every parliamentary device that you have to slow this down and strangle it. If it comes to that, will you do that?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Well, we haven't seen the bill, yet. You-- you know, none of the Democrats you had here have seen the final bill. The assistant Democratic leader has not seen the final bill. First, we need to see the final bill. That'd be a good place to start before you even get to whatever parliamentary techniques may be available.

Look, I think their biggest problem, Bob, is not forty Senate Republicans. It's the American people who are saying "Please don't pass this bill."

BOB SCHIEFFER: What is wrong with the setting up these nonprofits, which seems to be another part of this proposal that would be overseen by the government to offer health care, which the government would negotiate the rates on?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: You mean the government insurance issue?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yes. Yes.

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Well, you know, there's been a lot of discussion around that here inside the Beltway. Whether the government insurance option is in or out, you still have a hugely controversial core of the bill that is not likely to change in whatever iteration of this bill comes out of Reid's conference room at the-- at the end. That's not likely to change. Most of us feel that the government getting in the insurance business is the first step and there was a Democratic congressman from New York who said that this week the first step--what's called the single-payer system--that is a European-type government-run health care system. We know

the American people are not in favor of that. So, I think the Democrats have a dilemma--do they put it down, do they take it out. They still got the core of the bill that's very controversial.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think there's any way that any kind of a bill could be passed before Christmas?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: With the American people as overwhelming opposed to this bill as they are for the Democrats to-- to basically arrogantly take the position that we're going to ignore public opinion and jam this through before Christmas, I think that's really a stretch.

BOB SCHIEFFER: One quick question. Larry Summers, the President's economic advisor, said this morning on one of the other shows that he thinks the recession is over. Do you think it is?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Well, the ten percent of the Americans who are without work don't think it's over and the eleven percent who are unemployed in Kentucky don't think it's over. I hope he's right that we're beginning to come out of this economic slowdown. But, unemployment is the key.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Senator McConnell, thank you so much.

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Thank you.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Back in a moment with some final thoughts.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, if you haven't noticed, I am old school. I go back to the time when the boys were the ones who went out behind the barn and bragged about their conquests. Now it's the women who do the bragging. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But they're not shy about it. They march right out and unload on national television. But that's not my point. Tiger will pay his penalty and more. But as I watched the Tiger women tell their tales on TV, it made me wonder: is there anything people--men and women--won't do anymore to get on television?

Freud thought that sex was the driving force in human nature. But in this age of reality television, the White House gate-crashers, phony stories about kids in balloons and Tiger tales, he may want to rethink that theory.

I think getting on television has become the dominant force in American life. No matter how tawdry the tale, how ridiculous the costume required, how cheap the stunt, people will do anything now, tell anything, to get on television. Somehow, they seem to think it validates them. Shame? What's that?

"I had a ra-- a romp with Tiger," "I snuck in the White House," "I made a fool of myself, but so what, I got on television. Now I am somebody." Sorry to break the news, but no, you're not.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And that's it for us today. Be sure to watch 60 MINUTES tonight for Steve Kroft's interview with President Obama. We'll be right back here next week on FACE THE NATION.

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