Sent: Thu, 19 Nov 2009 08:11:13 -0500
From: "Person, Fran" <fran_person@ovp.eop.gov>
To: amperson@rosemontseneca.com
Bcc: amperson@rosemontseneca.com
Subject: Fw: Vice Presidential News Clips for Thursday, November 19, 2009
VPNewsClips091119.doc
VPNewsClips091119.pdf

----- Original Message -----
From: Bulletin News <VP-Editors@BulletinNews.com>
To: Alexander, Elizabeth; FOIA-6
Cc: Escudero, Adrian V.; Hoffman, Alan L.; Tomasini, AnnMarie; Bernal, Anthony R.; Blinken, Antony J.; Woyak, Brian J.; McKeon, Brian P.; Russell, Catherine M.; O'Donnell, Courtney; Hogan, Cynthia C.; Martens, Donald R.; Hire, Elisabeth; Oxhorn, Elizabeth A.; Allen, Elizabeth M.; Ryan, Evan M.; Person, Fran; Ziskend, Herbert M.; Carney, James F.; Bernstein, Jared; DeGraaf, Jason P.; O'Connor, Kevin C; White, Kirsten B.; membersOVPVPMILAIDE@whmo.mil <membersOVPVPMILAIDE@whmo.mil>; Donilon, Michael C.; Smith, Michele; Vela, Moises V.; Orloff, Nancy; Isaac, Nicole M.; Selfridge, Peter A.; Bleshman, Rachel; Klain, Ronald A.; Swan, Ryan S.; Fletcher, Sarah; Rosenthal, Sarah L.; Hawkins, Stacey T.; Henry, Sudafi; McSweeny, Terrell P.; McNulty, Thomas P.; Dirksen, Ward F.
Sent: Thu Nov 19 05:42:34 2009
Subject: Vice Presidential News Clips for Thursday, November 19, 2009

TO: THE VICE PRESIDENT AND STAFF
DATE: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2009 -- 6:15 AM EST

----------TODAY'S EDITION----------

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES:
+ Plouffe: Castle's 'Independent Profile' Will Be Challenged (WILNJ)
+ Prisons To Divide Health Contracts Into Parts (WILNJ)
+ Legislators Not Ready To Commit On Casinos (WILNJ)
+ Being First Lady (WILNJ)
+ Debate Heated On Proposed Apology For Slavery From State (WILNJ)
+ Town Urges Ban On Driver Texting (WILNJ)
+ Program To Restore Natural Habitat Shows Success (WILNJ)
+ Many Numbers To Reach Del. Government (WILNJ)
+ UD Community Pumped For Blood-drive Challenge (WILNJ)
+ New Learning Environment At Air Mobility Museum (WILNJ)
+ Working Together For Young Ones (WILNJ)
+ Doctors Reject New Screening Guidelines (WILNJ)
+ Thanksgiving Is All About The Turkey (WILNJ)
+ Autumn's Final Gifts (WILNJ)
+ Liquor Store Clerk Had 'No Choice' (WILNJ)
+ Child Pornographer Gets 30 Years (WILNJ)
+ Driver Alive After His Pickup Is Hit By Train (WILNJ)
+ Police Investigate Two Newark Heists (WILNJ)
+ N.J. Man Says His Life Ruined By Link To Prostitutes' Slayings (WILNJ/AP)

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL EDITORIALS:
+ China's Clear, Tough Message: Clean Up Your Financial Mess (WILNJ)
+ Such Galling Waste Requires Vigilance In Tracking Spending (WILNJ)

BIDEN IN THE NEWS:

+ Senate Health Plan Seeks To Add Coverage To 31 Million (NYT)
+ Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (NYT/AP)
+ Senate Health Bill Is Unveiled (WSJ)
+ Reid Bill Will Cost $849 Billion (POL)
+ Reid Plan Ups Pressure On Moderates (POL)
+ Senate's $849 Billion Health Bill Widens Coverage, Cuts Deficit (BLOOM)
+ Reid Pushes Holdouts To Vote For Health Bill Debate (Update2) (BLOOM)
+ Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (AP)
+ Daschle Is Still Go-to Guy On Healthcare (HILL)
+ Reid Rolling Out Big Guns To Push Healthcare Bill To 60 Needed Votes (HILL)
+ Senate Dems Take $849B Step Toward Healthcare Reform (HILL)
+ Landrieu Reax (POL)
+ As 2010 Looms, GOP Lays Its Bets On Opposing Health-care Reform (WP)
+ ABC: Stimulus Website.
+ Number Of Stimulus Jobs Created Called Into Question (WSJ)
+ GAO Calls For Clearer Guidance From Administration For Reporting Use Of Stimulus Funds (WP)
+ Job-counting Help Is Needed (WP)
+ Biden: Jobs Will Lag By 12 To 18 Months (NPR)
+ Biden Says Errors On Recovery.gov Will Be Fixed (CNN)
+ Feds: False Congressional Districts Removed From Stimulus Site (CNN)
+ Oops. Feds Add 45 Congressmen (OMAHA)
+ Where Did That Stimulus Money Go? (MINNST)
+ Fact-Checking Biden's Stimulus Fact-Check (ABC News)
+ No Gaffes, Few Laughs For Biden's Sitdown With Stewart (NBC DFW)
+ Mr. Obama's Task (NYT)
+ The First Lady Thanks Trailblazing Service Women (ABC)
+ Volunteers Assemble Care Packages For Female Troops (WJLA)
+ Palin Hits The (book) Trail (POL)

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES:

PLOUFFE: CASTLE'S 'INDEPENDENT PROFILE' WILL BE CHALLENGED (WILNJ)
By Nicole Gaudiano, News Journal Washington Bureau
Wilmington News Journal, November 18, 2009
WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama's campaign manager said Rep. Mike Castle's votes against health care reform and the economic stimulus package will hurt his bid for election to the U.S. Senate in 2010.
David Plouffe, a Delaware native, said he hasn't been following the race that closely. But he hit on themes voiced by other Democrats when asked on Tuesday how Democrats would mount a winning campaign against Castle.
"This was someone who had developed somewhat of an independent profile," said Plouffe, who is on tour with his new book chronicling the Obama campaign, "The Audacity to Win." "I think that's going to be challenged now given his recent behavior."
The Democratic National Committee began running a radio ad on WXCY in Wilmington this week, targeting Castle's vote against health care reform. Castle objected to the cost and various other elements of the bill.
The DNC also circulated poll results from the Susquehanna Polling & Research, showing Delaware Attorney General Beau Biden beating Castle by five points in a hypothetical race. Biden is expected to run for the remainder of his father Vice President Joe Biden's term, but has not declared his candidacy.
"I don't buy that Mike Castle can't be beat," said Plouffe.
Though Plouffe will be helping the DNC and administration "broadly" on political issues, he said he

will be doing very little political consulting next year.
Would he advise Beau Biden to jump into the race?
"It's rightly more of a personal decision," Plouffe said.
Plouffe said he and his former campaign rival Steve Schmidt will return occasionally to their shared alma mater, the University of Delaware, as they develop a center for political communication at the school. Schmidt served as campaign manager for Republican Presidential nominee, Sen. John McCain of Arizona.
"It's exciting," he said. "We disagree about many things, but we agree on the need to continue to produce young men and women who want to get involved in politics of both parties and this will be a good way to do it."

PRISONS TO DIVIDE HEALTH CONTRACTS INTO PARTS (WILNJ)
By Esteban Parra, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
Details on how the state will divide its inmate health-care contract -- which has been under federal scrutiny for three years -- were released Wednesday by the Department of Correction.
Rather than having a single health care provider, prison officials are breaking the contract into 10 smaller agreements focusing on specific services. The change comes a month after Corrections Commissioner Carl C. Danberg announced he was ending a contract next year with St. Louis-based Correction Medical Services (CMS), which has been criticized for providing inadequate health care despite being paid more than $130 million over three years.
"We expect this flexibility, and the increased competition it is expected to provide, will foster improved medical care and cost savings," Danberg said. "The Department spent significant time exploring alternative solutions to the way we contract for medical services. We believe this alternative will allow for large and small service providers to bid on the areas that fall within their specialization."
Delaware entered an agreement with the federal government to improve prison health care in 2006 following stories by The News Journal that uncovered problems and high inmate death rates, especially from AIDS and suicides. The 2005 series of stories also pointed to poor medical treatment for cancer, meningitis, hepatitis and other communicable diseases and bacterial infections.
Joshua W. Martin III, who leads a team appointed by the state and federal governments to monitor progress, issued a report in September saying it is unlikely the department will be in full compliance when the agreement expires next month.
If the state does not meet the deadline, the federal government can sue to take over the prisons or extend the agreement.
The new contract is posted on the department's Web site and the winning bidders could take over by July 1, 2010 -- the day after CMS' current contract ends. CMS also can bid on all or parts of the new contract.
Interested companies can bid on one or more of these services or they can bid to manage the entire health care program.
The DOC is seeking bidders for medical, nursing, mental health, dental, female health care and pharmacy services. It also is seeking to contract "specialty consultation," which includes examining the use of off-site specialists and negotiating contracts for providers to go onsite, as well as "utilization review services," whose responsibilities include monitoring integrated information concerning care.
Also on the list are substance abuse treatment and inpatient hospital services, which include critical care, inpatient case management and discharge planning.
The new contract also will have a "shared risk," with the DOC to payfor certain costs to prevent medical providers from limiting inmate care to maximize their profits.
Danberg has said he is not sure if the new contract format would reduce costs, adding that results he's seen across the country are mixed. While more companies competing for more bids would likely be financially better for the state in the short run, managing a larger number of vendors could become a problem as it increases other costs, such as hiring more people to oversee vendors.
Prison experts have given the new process mixed reviews.
Jeff Eiser, a former prison administrator in Ohio who is now a private consultant, said bidding out

the prison medical contract in smaller parts would result in better care. But Dr. Robert Cohen, who was appointed by state and federal courts to monitor prisons in five states, said the best way for Delaware to save money and improve prisoner health care would be to reduce the number of inmates by about a third.
The Rev. Christopher Bullock, senior pastor of New Canaan Baptist Church and co-founder of the Delaware Coalition for Prison Reform and Justice, said he is glad to see the CMS contract ending, adding he hopes state officials reject any CMS bids based on the company's record.
In addition to lawmakers having a say in the selection process, Bullock said he would like to see the public have input too because it is paying for the services.
Though he is happy the CMS chapter is coming to an end, Bullock said he is concerned that too many venders might be difficult to manage.
"There's a lot of questions if it's going to be done that way," Bullock said. "You know, sometimes when you have too many cooks in the kitchen the meal doesn't come out right.
"But if you have one chef who is in charge, then the meal always comes out better. I hope we're not putting too many cooks in the kitchen."

LEGISLATORS NOT READY TO COMMIT ON CASINOS (WILNJ)
By Ginger Gibson, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
Even as more developers come forward with hopes -- and funding -- to build a casino in Wilmington, many lawmakers are reserving judgment on whether they will support an expansion of gambling.
Senate Minority Whip Liane Sorenson said she doesn't have enough information to decide whether adding new casinos is a good idea. If an addition can provide new jobs, she might be willing to support it, she said.
"I think it will be helpful to have more information," Sorenson said.
Others, like Senate Majority Leader Patricia Blevins, D-Elsmere, say their mind is almost made up, but they'll wait for the results of a study of the impact of new gambling venues.
"It would take a lot of convincing for me to come to a point where I would think it's a good idea to have additional venues," Blevins said.
If the study finds that none of the existing casinos will be affected and new venues will only mean more jobs and higher state revenues, Blevins said, she could be persuaded to support an expansion.
House Majority Leader Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, would like to see additional venues in Sussex County and possibly in Wilmington.
Schwartzkopf said expanded gambling will only bring more jobs to the area and he is confident the study will support his view.
Only if the study concludes that Delaware would lose jobs and tax revenues would Schwartzkopf be persuaded otherwise, he said.
The study everyone seems to be waiting for was part of an agreement among lawmakers, Gov. Jack Markell and the state's three established casinos when sports betting and table games were approved. Markell supported new venues last year but backed down, agreeing to a study of the possible impact.
The study, which is being conducted by TMG Consulting from New Orleans, is expected to be completed by the end of December.
When lawmakers return to session in January they will likely be asked to vote on whether additional venues should be permitted. Under Schwartzkopf's proposal, one additional venue -- DelPointe Resort and Racino -- would be allowed to add slot machines and table games.
Rep. Dennis P. Williams, D-Wilmington North, has co-sponsored an amendment to the bill that would also create a casino district in Wilmington, where city and state officials would be empowered to authorize another venue.
To complicate the issue, table games still need a final legislative vote from lawmakers, including signing off on regulations and the tax levels.
Schwartzkopf said he won't bring the table games legislation to the floor for a debate unless the House is also willing to consider the measure to approve new venues.
Williams, who is hoping to join forces with Schwartzkopf to get both measures approved, said he

doesn't think a newer proposal by Kevin Flynn, a Philadelphia real estate developer, and George Miller, a lawyer-entrepreneur in Atlantic City who worked with Donald Trump, to build a facility on the Christina River is feasible.
Williams said the Seventh Street site would require a large infrastructure overhaul including a new bridge that would cost at least $9 million. Even if developers offer to pay for the bridge, Williams said he would be worried that the state would get stuck with the bill.
Williams said he suspects there are lots of developers ready to vie for the chance to open a casino in Wilmington, including many who already operate casinos in other areas.
"They just haven't flipped their cards yet," Williams said.

BEING FIRST LADY (WILNJ)
By Mary Alice Garrett, Special To The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
The role of first lady of Delaware has advantages and a few disadvantages.
This was the conclusion of the current governor's wife and two former governors' wives who spoke earlier this month at DuPont Country Club in Rockland. The occasion was "Campaigns, Canapes and Chicken Dinners: A Conversation with Delaware First Ladies," a fundraiser sponsored by Fresh Start, a charitable branch of Wilmington Women in Business.
The conversation was with Carla Markell, wife of Gov. Jack Markell; Martha Carper, wife of U.S. Sen. Tom Carper; and Jane Castle, wife of U.S. Rep. Mike Castle.
"What was the biggest surprise about being first lady?" asked moderator Nancy Karibjanian, former anchor for WHYY's "Delaware Tonight" and now an adjunct professor at the University of Delaware.
"The biggest surprise is I'm enjoying it more than I expected. It's really a lot of fun," said Markell.
Castle said being first lady of Delaware "is a lot more visible" than being a congressional wife.
Carper concurred, adding, "There's more of a defined role being first lady."
Both Markell and Carper said their children prefer their fathers not accompany them on their activities. However, "they do it all the time," noted Carper. "They say it's better without him."
Castle said "there are challenges" to having her husband shop with her in a supermarket. "I tell Mike 'Stay in the car.' "
Carper recalled her husband coming to a birthing class in a tuxedo and bringing a briefcase into the delivery room.
The women were asked how they maintain their own identities. "I refer to the first lady as not really me and in the third person," said Markell. Castle said maintaining separate identities is a priority for her and her husband.
Do their spouses ask them for advice? Markell said although they discuss issues, her husband usually goes fast asleep once his head hits the pillow. "If he really listened to me, I don't know that he would have run for governor," Markell said, smiling at the audience.
"I do manage to weigh-in on issues," Castle added. Carper said they "don't debate. We're sort of like real people. We don't have a lot of heavy conversations."
Does publicity about their husbands bother them?
"It's part of being in public life," said Castle. Markell and Carper agreed. "The children read the blogs. They think it's funny," added Markell. She reads the newspaper every day. "I don't internalize everything they [the media] say."
All three said they would never consider running for public office themselves. Markell said although "Jack loves what he's doing, I don't think I would really salivate to do it again." She added that the last governor's race was long, but "it was a very congenial race." She noted that contender John Carney was very considerate.
Castle closed by saying, "We're gearing up for a big race," referring to the 2010 U.S. Senate race. "It's 363 days from today," she told the audience of 250.
Markell met her husband while both were students at Newark High School. They went on to graduate from the University of Delaware. They've been married for 19 years and have two children, Molly and Michael. Carla Markell has worked in corporate training and human resources. She's also been a mentor to several at-risk students, and she's an advocate for the arts.
A native of Brandywine Hundred, Castle is also a UD graduate. She married then-Gov. Mike Castle in 1992 and was a first lady only six months before he was elected congressman. Jane

Castle worked on Capitol Hill for 10 years and later for a Washington architectural/engineering firm. She's been active in the community, serving on the boards of United Way of Delaware, Mental Health Association in Delaware, Literacy Volunteers of America, Christiana Care and the Wilmington Senior Center.
Born in Boone, N.C., Carper is a graduate of Appalachian State University and the University of Tennessee. In 1986, she married Tom Carper. The couple has two sons, Christopher and Ben, both in college. She joined the DuPont Co. in 1975. She held a number of management positions, including global business manager for Lycra. Since retiring from DuPont, Carper has been become a professor at UD. She's been active with Delaware Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls Inc. of Delaware and Boy Scouts of America.
Fresh Start awards college scholarships to Delaware women "who have faced personal and economic challenges," said president Mary Maloney. More than $60,000 in scholarships was granted to 35 women this year, and 100 women have received more than $300,000 since the nonprofit began in 1996. Details: www.wwb.org.

DEBATE HEATED ON PROPOSED APOLOGY FOR SLAVERY FROM STATE (WILNJ)
By James Merriweather, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
DOVER -- Amid sometimes frayed tempers, Dover residents offered a range of opinions on whether the Delaware General Assembly should issue an apology for slavery.
Many speakers said an apology would be too little, too late and questioned the sincerity of any such gesture that might be issued by a state that was among the last to formally repudiate slavery.
Kathy Doyle, a Campus Community Charter School teacher who swelled the crowd by offering extra credit for attendance to one of her classes, said she was appalled to learn that the state did not ratify the 13th Amendment, which ostensibly ended slavery in 1865, until 1901.
"If Alabama could apologize for slavery," she said, drawing applause from many in the crowd of about 70 residents, "we think that Delaware surely could."
Others insisted, though, that an apology for the ongoing vestiges of slavery -- namely Jim Crow laws that institutionalized racism long after slavery was abolished -- was more appropriate than apologizing for slavery itself.
"I think the apology should be issued for discriminatory laws passed in the 20th century," said Della Sue Robinson, adding that she questioned the validity of an apology coming from people who had nothing to do with slavery.
The debate represented the beginning of the commission's second try to persuade the Dover City Council to pass a resolution -- adopted unanimously by the commission on April 25, 2007 -- calling on the state Legislature to apologize for slavery on behalf of the state. After hearing debate in May 2007, the council sent the proposal back to the commission with instructions to conduct a series of public forums on the issue.
Sam Hoff, the commission chairman and the primary author of the resolution, said Wednesday night's session was the first of two forums the commission will conduct before the matter is taken back to the council.
In serving notice of Wednesday night's forum, the commission sent a white paper of sorts to council members, noting that the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives and legislatures in six states -- Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Alabama, Florida and New Jersey -- had adopted resolutions of apology for slavery. The letter included the text of all eight resolutions as well as the text of the commission's own proposal -- by which the council would call on the legislature to adopt a resolution "acknowledging and expressing its profound apology for the state's practice of slavery and for the historic wrongs committed against all persons who suffered discrimination and injustice under this dehumanizing system ... ."
At one point, Sen. Margaret Rose Henry, D-Wilmington East, said she had considered introducing legislation to provide an opportunity for a vote on the issue, but reported that she found little support for an apology and didn't file a bill.
Hoff, a political science professor at Delaware State University, has described slavery as the most shameful crime against humanity ever committed in Delaware. He argued that an apology was the first step toward earning forgiveness from blacks and improving race relations in the First State.
At Wednesday night's hearing, several speakers agreed, saying an apology would represent a big

step toward reconciliation.
"I came to support the idea of an apology," said 62-year-old James Brooks, a 14-year Delaware resident who first visited the state as an enlisted man at Dover Air Force Base in 1966. "I think it's high time. I think we should have apologized decades ago, when we first knew it was wrong."
Lafayette Bell said that racism and discrimination are still rampant, however, and an apology for slavery would not count for much.
"Even if an apology is given," he said, "it's not going to help African Americans much. Most African Americans don't think its genuine anyway."
Jahi Issa, a history professor at DSU, said history would not judge the state well if an apology was not issued.
"Slavery is not to far behind us," he said. "As the First State, I believe we should have been the first state to apologize for slavery. History is judging us. We don't want to be the last."

TOWN URGES BAN ON DRIVER TEXTING (WILNJ)
By Michael Short, The (salisbury, Md.) Daily Times
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
OCEAN VIEW -- Town Council will send a letter to the state, urging officials to ban texting and e-mailing while driving.
In recent months, a number of Sussex County towns have taken similar measures.
Texting while driving has been called a "dangerous practice," and some say it's imperative that there be repercussions for those who drive distracted.
According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, text messaging is banned for all drivers in 11 states, including Maryland, Virginia and New Jersey. Delaware is one of 10 states that prohibit texting by novice drivers.
"AAA calls for passage of a texting-while-driving ban in Delaware," said Catherine Rossi, spokeswoman for AAA Mid-Atlantic. "AAA discourages motorists from engaging in any distraction while behind the wheel, and texting is the epitome of distracted driving."
In a AAA poll conducted this year, 96 percent of Delawareans supported a texting ban.
Legislation banning texting and e-mailing while driving overwhelmingly passed the House earlier this year and is currently on the Senate Ready List.
The bill's sponsor, Rep. Joe Miro, R-Pike Creek Valley, initially sought to bar the use of handheld cell phones, but dropped that provision when it became clear the proposal lacked sufficient support.
"[The bill] is not everything I wanted," Miro said earlier this year. "But I am a guy who listens and compromises when I have to in order to achieve something that will improve the safety of all the people on our roads. I think it is a victory for all of us who want to make Delaware roads safer."
While the proposed law would apply to all motorists, Miro believes it will have the greatest impact on young adults.
"This [bill] would prohibit [texting] and hopefully make sure that they are paying attention to what's in front of them," he said.
Ocean View plans to send its letter to Sen. George H. Bunting, D-Bethany Beach, for review.
While town officials considered enacting their own ban, some believe a state ban would be easier to enforce.
"I don't think we have any way at all of policing it," Councilman Bill Wichmann said. "By the time an officer finds out if they are texting, they'll be out of town."
If enacted, Delaware's legislation would carry a penalty of a $50 fine.

PROGRAM TO RESTORE NATURAL HABITAT SHOWS SUCCESS (WILNJ)
By Alex Ruoff, The (salisbury, Md.) Daily Times
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
SEAFORD -- For the past few years, Glenn Lovelace's dream has been to transform nearly all of his 50 acres of land into a natural bird habitat.
So, about three years ago, he let his fields go fallow and last year entered into the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Landowner Incentive Program to get some assistance.
The program has restored and enhanced more than 1,300 acres of natural habitat in Delaware by

providing economic incentives to private landowners. But the future of the program is unclear as the federal government has not been able to fund the project since 2006.
Now, state environmental agents are hoping to use what's left in their coffers to support just a few, high-priority areas.
"The commission [which selects the projects] will most likely choose just one big project or some we consider high priority," said Shelley Tovell, an environmental specialist for DNREC's Department of Fish and Wildlife. "We're really looking at the last of the money."
Through the program, Lovelace was able to take about 40 acres of land and create a newly restored home for local birds that have been driven out of the area by a lack of suitable areas to nest.
Through the federally funded assistance program, the state pays private landowners to maintain natural habitat for species of great conservation need, DNREC officials said. Property owners receive technical and financial assistance for their efforts.
Lovelace said he's already seen results on his land.
"I've seen some different birds move in," he said. "I've seen high counts on several different species already."
Tovell said federal aid for the program, provided through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has ended, leaving her uncertain as to whether the program will live on past the barely $200,000 left.
"One of the reasons we had such a great response is that [the program] was funded 75 [percent] through federal funds," she said. "Most programs are a 50/50 split, so this was fairly inexpensive for us."
Tovell said anyone who's already signed a contract is guaranteed their money, but expanding efforts will be impossible without extra funding. While the state has a number of alternative programs, Tovell said LIP's popularity was its economic incentives.
Byron Jefferson, of Lincoln, said he joined the program to preserve nearly 100 acres of his property because he could get a better price than renting it out for farming. He said he's pleased with the results and is glad to be providing natural habitat and renewed forest. When his contract ends, he may not continue to preserve the area if financial aid is unavailable.
Interested landowners may request an application by calling 735-3600. Proposals for 2010 funding will be accepted through Dec. 14.

MANY NUMBERS TO REACH DEL. GOVERNMENT (WILNJ)
By Ken Mammarella, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
Yes, so much information and so much contact between Delawareans and their state government are moving online.
But sometimes -- for people who aren't online, for people who aren't sure where to go or for people frustrated with what they encounter online -- a phone call may be more desirable.
A Wilmington phone book has six pages of state government listings. What follows are toll-free phone numbers that are promoted for connecting to Delaware state government.
The most important numbers
The most important number of them all is 911, for life-threatening medical and public safety. Dispatchers are ready to direct medical and law enforcement personnel to the rescue. In response to a recent question in Spark about a mattress in the middle of the highway, Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh said "Anytime there's a risk of serious physical injury or a traffic crash, it's absolutely appropriate to call 911." Calls are triaged and divided up among appropriate agencies, he said. Non-emergency number for Delaware State Police is (800) 837-3771.
The new 211 service -- from Delaware Helpline with support from the United Way and the state -- is a quick way to connect to thousands of health and human services programs, including rent assistance, food banks, affordable housing, health resources, mental health resources, child care, after-school programs, care for senior citizens, financial assistance, legal assistance and job training programs.
As helpful as that is, it's only answered during extended weekday business hours. (Delaware Helpline hopes to staff that number 24/7 in a few years). Ditto for the nonprofit's other number, (800) 464-4357.
Hotlines that reach people

The phone book and the state's own Web site list a number of hotlines. These numbers were tested from New Castle County and answered outside of regular business hours. Some numbers were answered by people in other states or by answering services.

Child abuse and emotional problems. (800) 292-9582 connects to the Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families. For emergency help with children's emotional problems, (800) 722-7710 is also maintained.

Crime victims and survivors: (800) 842-8461 connects to a person at state police. (800) 870-1790 is the attorney general's office and goes to voice-mail at off-hours.

Delaware Crime Stoppers: (800) 847-3333.

Diseases and bioterrorism: (888) 295-5156.

Domestic abuse: (800) 743-5754.

Environment. (800) 662-8802. This is a general number for the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, including air and waste management and parks and recreation. Environmental concerns including open burning, chemical spills, pesticide spills, emissions from factories, illegal dumping on land (such as at the three yard-waste sites in New Castle County) and at sea.

Fishing violations, inland bays. (800) 523-3336 is a DNREC number for fishing violations and for polution in the inland bays of Sussex County.

Mental health: (800) 652-2929. This leads to a mobile unit that handles crisis intervention, drug and alcohol crises, pyschiatric emergencies and severe personal, family, or marital problems.

Poison: (800) 222-1222, which is routed to local poison centers no matter where you call from.

Roads: (800) 324-8379 is maintained by the Delaware Department of Transportation. The Transportation Management Center is the place to go to report problems (such as a traffic signal that's not working, debris or wild animals) or ask questions (when's that road repair scheduled to end?).

Sexual violence, sucide and parents thinking of surrendering a baby: Contact Delaware, 761-9100 in New Castle County, (800) 262-9800 downstate.

Smoking Quitline: (866) 409-1858.

Wildlife. (800) 292-3030 is DNREC's Wildlife Operation Game Theft Hotline Operation Game Theft. Tips that lead to the arrest and conviction of people violating state hunting and wildlife laws can lead to rewards of up to $1,000.

Hotlines that reach interactive recordings

Access Delaware: (866) 276-2353, for the status of your state income tax refund or to find polling places or free public Web access.

School closings: (877) 831-7215

Other toll-free numbers

The following numbers are ones that Delaware residents (as contrasted to state employees or businesses) might use to reach state government. A state Web page (http://delaware.gov/egov/portal.nsf/portal/tollfree) lists dozens.

COMPLAINTS, TIPS

Alcohol violations: (800) 393-7327.

Consumer protection, debt management: (800) 220-5424

Fraud, waste, and abuse of state government resources: (800) 553-7283.

Governor's office: (800) 292-9570.

Home health care or hospice agencies: (800) 942-7373.

Housing law violations: 877-544-8626.

Indoor smoking ban violations: (800) 297-5926.

Insurance companies, agents: (800) 282-8611.

Insurance fraud: (800) 632-5154.

Long-term care facilities: (877) 453-0012.

Mosquito control: (800) 338-8181.

Pesticide misuse: (800) 282-8685.

EDUCATION

Delaware Educator Data System: 888-759-9133. For people obtaining teaching certification.

Groves Diploma at a Distance: (888) 321-4723. For adult learners obtaining high school diplomas.

Higher Education Commission: (800) 292-7935. Scholarships, grants and college-prep

information.
K-12 education: (877) 838-3787.
School-related crime, including bullying: (800) 220-5414.
Upward Bound: (866) 227-5566. Program to prepare students for college in partnership with the University of Delaware.
HEALTH, PUBLIC WELFARE
Aging, adults with physical disabilities: (800) 223-9074.
Child care licensing: (800) 822-2236.
Child Development Watch: (800) 671-0050. Program for children ages birth to 3 with disabilities or developmental delays.
Deaf-blind children: (800) 292-9590.
Elderinfo insurance counseling: (800) 336-9500. For people with Medicare.
HIV/AIDS: (800) 422-0429.
Immunizations: (800) 282-8672.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, food stamps, subsidized child care and Refugee Cash Assistance programs: (800) 372-2022.
Women, Infants and Children; nutrition and physical activity: (800) 222-2189.
LIBRARIES AND DATA
Delaware Division of Libraries: (800) 282-8696.
Legislative Council Research: (800) 282-8545. Legislative research and the Delaware Register of Regulations.
Library for the Blind/Handicapped: (800) 282-8676.
TAXES
Tax forms: (800) 292-7826.
Tax refund status: (866) 276-2353.
TRANSPORTATION
DART: (800) 355-8080 for customer relations, (800) 652-3278 for reservations.
DelDOT: (800) 652-5600.
Rideshare Delaware: (888) 743-3628.
OTHER CALLS
Agriculture emergencies: 877-831-7217.
Delaware Solid Waste Authority: (800) 404-7080.
Delaware Tourism Office: (800) 441-8846.
Housing: (888-363) 8808.
Juvenile fire setter intervention: (800) 432-8500.
Lottery numbers: (800) 338-6200. Remember, they're not official until they're verified.
Natural Resources and Environmental Control: (800) 922-9283.
State Fire School: (800) 282-8650.
Treasurer: (800) 675-8600. Personal finance tips.
Unemployment benefits: (800) 794-3032. Claim weekly unemployment insurance benefits by telephone.
Utilities: Public Advocate -- (888) 607-2427 -- advocates for consumers on utility rates. Public Service Commission -- (800) 282-8574 -- regulates utilities.
Veterans Affairs: (800) 344-9900. Assistance with veterans benefits and burial services.
Vital statistics: (877) 888-0248. Provides copies of birth, death, adoptee and marriage certificates.
Voting and elections: (877) 270-8300.

UD COMMUNITY PUMPED FOR BLOOD-DRIVE CHALLENGE (WILNJ)
By April Abel, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
NEWARK -- University of Delaware students and faculty were out for blood Wednesday.
Donating blood, that is.
About 500 people registered to donate blood for the 8th Annual Colonial Athletic Association Blood Challenge, which pits the school against 11 other schools in the athletic conference to collect the most blood donations in a one-day fall drive.
Last year, UD brought in 604 donations. Wednesday's goal: 900 donors.

"The competition is fierce among the schools. UD has won five times but was narrowly beaten by Drexel University for the last three years," said Carrie Aiken of the Blood Bank of Delmarva.
Blood Bank of Delmarva closed its donor centers for the day to provide staff and equipment.
"We can't announce the day's totals until the competition is over in early December," Aiken said.
But the real winners, blood bank leaders said, are the patients who will benefit from the lifesaving blood.
Over the past seven years, the CAA Blood Challenge has raised 17,728 units of blood.
The multipurpose rooms at the Trabant University Center in Newark were bustling Wednesday with a well-orchestrated scene of students and staff.
"We always get a lot of walk-ins," Aiken said.
Doors opened at 7:30 a.m. By 10 a.m., 30 beds were full and people were moving smoothly through the computer screening, donation and all-important snack break and brief monitoring afterwards.
UD nursing student Emily Wagner donates blood at least twice a year.
"I really do it for the cookies," she joked.
UD music faculty member Xiang Gao also said he donates blood regularly.
"As a musician, I give my best to help people. Giving blood is another way of giving my best," he said.
Gao was one of the many donors giving a traditional whole blood donation on a bed in the main donor area.
Along the wall, it got a little more high-tech.
The Blood Bank brought along all four of its ALYX anapheresis machines for this drive.
These fully automated machines allow qualified donors to give twice the amount of red blood cells in one donation.
Donors who meet height and weight criteria -- at least 5 feet 1 inches tall and weighing 130 pounds for men, or 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighing 150 pounds for women -- are offered the opportunity to donate blood via the ALYX machine.
The phlebotomist inserts the needle and line into the donor's arm, and ALYX draws the blood, separates red cells from plasma, and returns a mixture of sterile saline and plasma to the donor.
"The benefit of this is there is no net fluid loss for the donor, and the Blood Bank gets twice as many red blood cells from one donation," said Kathy Armstrong, of the Blood Bank.
Andrew Smith, 19, is a freshman at UD. He was donating via ALYX for the first time, and "felt no different" than when he gave a whole blood donation last year.
Armstrong offered Smith a choice of UD blue or gold elastic gauze to wrap the donation site, and sent him off to the snack table.
"I remember him from when he donated in high school," she said. "It was nice to see a familiar face."

NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT AIR MOBILITY MUSEUM (WILNJ)
By The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
Students from around the state visited the Air Mobility Command Museum in Dover on Wednesday to celebrate the 11th anniversary of GIS Day, an international even to promote awareness of geographic information systems.
TOP PHOTO: Seaira Williams (right), 10, a McVey Elementary student, lands her plane safely on a flight simulator, with a little help from volunteer David Doyle.
BELOW: With help from volunteer Maggie Legates (right), students put together a map of Europe on the floor using technology they are learning at the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover Air Force Base.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR YOUNG ONES (WILNJ)
By Edward L. Kenney, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 18, 2009
With three early childhood centers -- and another on the way if the upcoming referendum passes -- the Appoquinimink School District has buttressed with action the belief that children should start learning well before grade school.

But it has not stopped there. Rather than wait for children ages 3 to 5 to enroll in the centers, district leaders have developed an outreach program that trains Middletown-area day care providers to give the children an even earlier head start.
"In the past, the school district and the community providers sort of passed [like ships] in the night, so to speak, yet we're all sharing the same kids," said Sandra Cohee, principal at the Cedar Lane Early Childhood Center. "We give them a more in-depth view of what we do at school. This has opened up a conduit of information."
Cohee, the leaders of the other two early childhood centers and an educational diagnostician make up the leadership in a newly formed Preschool Coalition Committee that plans training for the day care providers.
The district has worked with the providers informally for the past 10 years, beginning when the Appoquinimink Early Childhood Center opened its doors as the first such center in the district, she said.
But this year marks an effort to give the initiative better structure, a move necessitated both because of district growth and the growing number of day care centers in the Middletown area, now about 15.
"There are other districts that are doing similar things, but not as formalized as we are doing it," Cohee said. "It's a great idea. And it really has opened up communication, so we are on the same page as the providers."
"Developing this liaison helps to build a bridge," added committee member Lucia Weathers, assistant principal at the Townsend Early Childhood Center.
Licensed day care providers are required by state law to receive 18 hours of training a year in subjects such as classroom management, parental involvement, developing fine and gross motor skills, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
Providers usually have to pay for that training, but the district offers it free, holding sessions as part of evening dinner meetings that have drawn as many as 75 day care people.
Meetings are held every two to three months and are assigned a training theme, Cohee said. One scheduled for January will be about discipline.
Rene Nolen, the principal at the Appoquinimink Early Childhood Center and a member of the Preschool Coalition Committee, said the district also can teach things that will help the children with social skills such as sharing and teamwork, paving the way for the more academic lessons to come.
"Then when they get here, they're ready for reading and words and counting," she said.
"The kindergarten year is so critical," added fellow committee member Kathy Gertley, a district educational diagnostician who used to go out on her own to the day care centers before things got better organized. "It just sets them up for success in their educational career.
"We want them to instill in them the love of learning," she said of the day care providers.
As an owner of the Kiddie Academy childcare center in Middletown, Susan Tudor appreciates the training the district is giving her 20 teachers.
"It's a good opportunity to get those hours and not have to pay for it," she said. "In early childcare, it's definitely not a career you go into to make money. As a business owner, I wish I could say I will pay for all your training, but I can't afford it."
Tudor also likes what the teachers are taking away from the training, which cannot help but benefit the 115 children at her day care center.
"I think it helps educate my teachers, giving them different ideas," she said. "They can kind of feed off each other. I think it gives them a chance to grow together. It keeps my teachers fresh and aware of what's going on out there."
Said Weathers, "Those centers know that we value what they do, and just knowing that helps them to keep coming back."

DOCTORS REJECT NEW SCREENING GUIDELINES (WILNJ)
By Angie Basiouny, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
Some Delaware doctors are rejecting new recommendations from a federal panel advising women to wait until age 50 to get routine mammograms and abandon breast self-exams because they do no good.

The physicians said Wednesday they disagree with the reasoning behind the report and are telling patients, many of whom are confused about the news from the independent U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, to stick to conventional guidelines that call for self-exams and routine screenings at 40.

"It certainly was an easy one for me," Dr. Nick Petrelli, director of Christiana Care's Helen F. Graham Cancer Center, said of his decision to continue with current guidelines. "I've experienced this over the years with patients. I've seen it, I've seen the evidence, and we're not going to change."

Petrelli, a surgical oncologist, pointed to the significant reduction in mortality rates in the United States and around the world since women began screening in their 40s and even younger. He also does not see the logic in telling women to not perform self-exams, which often is a first step in early detection of tumors.

"Women know their bodes better than any physician or anybody else," he said. "I see no down side to self-examination. It certainly doesn't cost anything and it's not time consuming."

Cindy DelGiorno figures she would be dead by now if she had followed the new recommendations. DelGiorno, a teacher at A.I. duPont High School, found a lump in her breast during a self-exam in 2007, when she was 34. A subsequent mammogram revealed a tumor. During chemotherapy, she realized that older women were having a much tougher time battling the disease and the effects of treatment.

"It's absurd. I couldn't believe it," she said of the report. "I don't know who this research group is, but do they want to kill off women? It's disturbing."

In Delaware and across the country, there is a rising chorus of health professionals, politicians and advocacy groups questioning the wisdom of the findings, which contend women in their 40s are more likely to get false-positive tests that can lead to unnecessary biopsies and anxiety.

The recommendations don't apply to women who carry a high risk of breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society reacted swiftly to the report and posted a statement Monday on its Web site that the organization remains with its long-standing position advocating for yearly screenings starting at age 40. The American College of Radiology also was critical of the findings, saying it would result in countless unnecessary deaths each year.

Federal policy unchanged

To ease confusion, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius said Wednesday the task force does not set federal policy and the government's view on screenings at 40 remains unchanged.

"My message to women is simple," she said. "Mammograms have always been an important lifesaving tool in the fight against breast cancer and they still are today. Keep doing what you have been doing for years -- talk to your doctor about your individual history, ask questions and make the decision that is right for you."

That advice is echoed by the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition, an awareness and support organization that runs the state mammography van, which is about to be retrofitted to use the latest in digital imaging.

Coalition Executive Director Vicky Cooke said the office phone has been ringing all week with women wanting to know what they should do. The report has been the topic of debate among staff members for days.

In the end, she said, the group opted to follow the current rules. It's a break from the position taken by the National Breast Cancer Coalition, which has endorsed the new recommendations.

"We're an organization that relies on responsible information, and right now there is a lot of confusion," Cooke said. "So we are going to step back and continue to do what we've always done and operate by the current guidelines."

Officials with the Delaware Division of Public Health declined to be interviewed and released a statement saying they are studying the recommendations and working with the state's Cancer Consortium to determine the implications for Delaware.

Dr. Tom Vaughan, director of women's health and chairman for diagnostic imaging for Bayhealth Medical Center, said he thinks the task force focused too much on the costs, time and other negatives associated with benign tumors and not enough on the benefits of early detection. He said mammograms aren't perfect, but they are powerful tools in helping save lives.

"My experience with an extensive number of biopsies is that most people, even if there is a 1

percent chance that they have cancer, are happy to have this done," he said.
Dr. Wendy Newell, a breast surgeon in private practice with Wolf Creek Surgeons in Dover, agreed with Vaughan and Petrelli from Christiana Care. She said the task force needs to rescind the guidelines and worries that the news will set back decades of work to educate women about early detection.
She's continuing to advise patients to screen at 40 and learn how to conduct self exams.
"They could end up having a more advanced breast cancer if they wait every other year, or they could end up dying," Newell said.
Breast-cancer survivor, Newark resident Terri Stuiber, also is upset with the report and pondered her fate had she followed the advice.
"I would probably not be here right now," she said.
Stuiber found her lump during a self-exam two years ago, when she was 47, and had a bilateral mastectomy. Like DelGiorno, she had no family history of breast cancer.
When she first heard about the report, she thought maybe it was a mistake.
"I went crazy, especially when they said don't even teach breast self-exams," Stuiber said. "I was floored that anybody would come out with that. I have two daughters. I would never want them to take that lightly. I tell them to get educated and have their checkups."

THANKSGIVING IS ALL ABOUT THE TURKEY (WILNJ)
By Molly Murray, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
With Thanksgiving a week away, it's crunch time at TA Farms in Wyoming. So many turkeys, so many platters to fill.
These birds -- raised on a mixture of corn, soybeans and minerals -- are organic, free-range turkeys.
"We grow our own feed, we make our own feed," Dan Palmer said. "It makes them taste juicier and have more flavor."
Then, there are the store-bought birds.
"Created," said Sherrie Rosenblatt, a spokeswoman for the National Turkey Federation, "to fulfill consumer desire for white meat."
These birds were selectively bred for large breasts, lots of white meat and a speedy growth process.
About 90 percent of households in the United States will eat an organic turkey like Palmer grows or the store-bought kind this Thanksgiving. In all, some 46 million turkeys will be sold for the holiday, Rosenblatt said.
But the real purist may want to hone the hunter-gatherer instinct, don the mossy oak camoflauge and bag a wild turkey for the feast.
"They are very good eating," said Matt DiBona, a wildlife biologist with the state Division of Fish & Wildlife.
There's only one problem. Delaware doesn't have a fall hunting season for wild turkey, so unless a hunter planned ahead in spring, a Delaware wild turkey won't be on the Thanksgiving menu.
In some ways, it is a small conservation miracle the state has a season -- or wild turkeys -- at all.
The population in Delaware was wiped out by the mid-1800s and they were pretty much gone from throughout their native, East Coast range in the mid- to late 1800s, said Bob Eriksen, director of conservation operations and a regional wildlife biologist with the National Wild Turkey Federation.
The last wild turkey in New York was killed in 1846. The last wild bird in Connecticut died in 1813.
Extensive deforestation made a 19th century comeback next to impossible, Eriksen said.
Over time, marginal farmland that had been cleared began to revert back to forest. In the early 1960s and 1970s, efforts to bring back the birds began, Eriksen said.
By the end of the 1800s, an estimated 220,000 wild turkeys were left in the continental United States, compared to an estimated 10 million to 12 million when Colonists arrived from Europe, Eriksen said.
Today, there are an estimated 7 million to 7. 5 million birds in 49 states. Eriksen said the only state without a population of wild turkeys is Alaska.
These days, the East Coast is terrific wild turkey habitat because of productive forests with lots of seeds, nuts and berries -- all foods that wild turkeys eat, he said.

Delaware officials began a reintroduction program in Sussex County in 1984. As those birds thrived and more were added, they began a trapping program to introduce birds to Kent County. In early 2002, more birds were brought in from South Carolina and Virginia and released in New Castle County, DiBona said.
There are an estimated 4,000 wild turkeys in the state, he said. "It is probably one of the greatest conservation success stories ever."
Still, the population isn't big enough yet to allow a fall hunting season. The spring season in 2010 is three weeks, starting April 10.
These wild birds are the cousins of the birds that Palmer raises and sells, and also are related to the ones shoppers find in the grocery store.
On that first Thanksgiving, back at Plymouth Rock, the wild turkey dished up by the Wampanoag wasn't something new for the Pilgrims.
Turkeys were first caged and domesticated in Central Mexico more than 2,000 years ago. And when the Spaniards arrived in the new world, they took the bird back to Europe.
Of course, the bird the Pilgrims ate in 1621 was way different than the broad-breasted birds of today's table, and was probably even different from the wild turkeys we see today.
The grocery store birds grow quickly.
Palmer's birds -- even with their all-natural diet -- put on pounds at a speedy rate, going from day-old pullets to dinner-table size in 16 to 20 weeks. A 20-week-old turkey at TA Farms dresses out to 24 pounds.
Wild birds don't have those snowy-white feathers, and they grow much slower. Their diet is different, and because they are foragers, they are much more muscled, Eriksen said.
A wild turkey that hatched back in June won't be nearly as big. The male will weigh 10 to 12 pounds and the female 6 or 7, Eriksen said. A domestic male of the same age would weigh 30 pounds, he said.
Selective breeding has allowed the bigger birds with the white feathers. There is even a farm-raised turkey that grows to 80 pounds, he said.
Imagine fitting that in your oven.
The wild birds aren't as meaty -- diet and a higher level of activity probably have something to do with that, Eriksen said.
But for people who want a wild bird, there is nothing quite like it in the world of hunting, DiBona said.
The birds have exceptional eyesight. Deer, on the other hand, have an exceptional sense of smell. "We joke that if you could have an animal with the sense of smell of a deer and the eyesight of a turkey, you'd have an unhuntable animal," DiBona said.
It takes lots of preparation to figure out where turkeys are roosting, and a hunter can't talk or move around once the spot is selected. Turkey hunters typically call in the birds using a series of devices that mimic the sounds that turkeys make.
And when they do take a shot, it's at close range.
In hunting, "it's probably the most fun you can have," DiBona said.

AUTUMN'S FINAL GIFTS (WILNJ)
By Nature's Landscapes, By Rick J. Lewandowski
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
With a suddenness out of character with our typical autumnal explosion of foliage colors, this season came to an abrupt and dramatic close.
Somehow, I'd been lulled into taking for granted the late season floral displays and sumptuous colors of foliage that every year seemed to go on for weeks. So you can probably understand my surprise when, with frigid finality, the first killing frost of the season struck with temperatures hovering in the mid-20s.
And, as if to drive the point home, the region was then pummeled by one of the strongest nor'easters in recent memory. Over three days, its winds and driving rains wrenched from the trees most of the remaining leaves not damaged by frost, leaving branches exposed and forlorn.
Frankly, I was left with a hollow feeling that I'd missed the opportunity to fully appreciate autumn.
Even so, I was determined to find some consolation in the pre-winter landscape as nature took one last deep breath before plunging into winter. So, out for a walk I went.

Stark silhouettes of tree trunks with sharp shadows cast on the ground now replaced the deep shade of summer. Oddly attractive, I thought. Had I noticed before?
Shuffling along paths laden with newly fallen wind-blown leaves, I was also reminded of the simple pleasure of being immersed in this sea of brown that parted at the slightest movement of my feet. Perhaps all wasn't lost after all; in fact, I was starting to feel a little better already.
It was then that I discovered to my delight, and not so unexpectedly as it turns out, that the frost-laden air of early November and harsh treatment by the nor'easter hadn't completely obliterated the last glimmer of autumn's spectacle. In fact, the layered tree canopy had offered its last leaves as a sacrifice to the frigid air, wind, and rain in order to protect the shrubs and perennials lying at its feet.
Indeed, I realized that the garden was more than just the remnants of leaves and branches left behind by frost and storm; there was considerable life left in this late season landscape for us to appreciate.
A gaggle of goodies
Armed with this new perspective, I ran back to grab my camera and laptop so I could share some of the late-season garden joy I'd discovered. I realized there was surely a spot in gardens for these plants, in particular, to extend the season right up to the very precipice of autumn's end.
Honestly, November is probably not at the top of the list for season-ending flower highlights. Yet, in my stroll through the garden some plants really stood out.
Among the best perennials still flowering were the pale lavender-flowered Raydon's Favorite aromatic aster (Symphyotrichum oblongifolium), the deep purple-flowered Georgia aster (Symphyotrichum georgianum), and the pale yellow-flowered Mellow Yellow sunflower (Helianthus angustifolius) as well as the delicate yellow-flowered, multi-stemmed tree, common witch hazel (Hamamelis virginiana).
While colorful foliage is a reliable feature of autumn in our region, a few plants withstood killing frost and storms particularly well, retaining their leaves and color. These plants added an even greater allure to the late-season luster of the garden because of their durability.
The fine textured golden yellow autumn foliage of Arkansas blue star (Amsonia hubrichtii) represents one of only a handful of perennials with colorful autumn foliage and is a colorful companion to the golden autumn foliage of Carolina sweet-shrub (Calycanthus floridus).
Other shrubs such as Mt. Airy fothergilla with its yellowish to pale red foliage, sweet azalea (Rhododendron arborescens) with its fiery red foliage, and oakleaf hydrangea (Hydrangea quercifolia) with foliage colors ranging from green and yellow to purple and wine red, weathered the late autumn conditions admirably, proving their worth.
Even though it is an uncommon garden shrub, Alabama croton (Croton alabamensis) may have offered the most striking late autumn foliage, showcasing pumpkin-orange leaves with silvery undersides.
Each autumn we certainly expect showy fruit displays. Yet, the early departure of most fall foliage this year made fruit an even more important feature for late-season interest.
The dense clusters of lavender-purple berries on American beautyberry (Callicarpa americana) provide some of the most unusual color to be found in the garden. Masses of brilliant red fruit on Winter King hawthorn (Crataegus viridis) and bright yellow fruit of Winter Gold winterberry holly (Ilex verticillata) highlighted their staying power that will insure continued beauty well into winter.
Even American holly (Ilex opaca) with its red fruit displays, provided a special appeal with the early departure of deciduous leaves, reaffirming its important quality as an evergreen tree that keeps the garden interesting even in winter.
Certainly, there are other plants that proved their worth this autumn, but these plants highlight some of late autumn's best performers.
I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention that each year brings with it a unique set of seasonal conditions.
Some years can be quirky; others are not. You might not see all these plants performing well so late each autumn but, in my humble opinion, the pleasure of having them brighten the garden for their normal beauty as well as the off chance that you might even get a few extra days of interest make them well worth the effort.
As gardeners, our powers of observation are often the most important tools we have. Don't be shy. Get outside and study what is happening in the landscape. Keen observations and a curious mind

offer innumerable opportunities for us to enhance our gardens.
While autumn is now truly nearing an end, be sure to enjoy the changing light and the drama of contrast in the landscape.
Remember, too, as I've recently rediscovered that, when you least expect it, you're almost sure to learn something new!

LIQUOR STORE CLERK HAD 'NO CHOICE' (WILNJ)
By Adam Taylor, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
WILMINGTON -- Before the night clerk at Favors Liquor Store could react Tuesday night, one armed robber jumped through the take-out window and another ran behind the counter.
"One had a gun at his head and the other had a gun at his chest," said Ed Pensky, the store's owner.
Shortly after money was taken from the cash register, the clerk pulled his own gun and shots were fired, Pensky said. The clerk shot one of the men, who ran on North Walnut Street and collapsed about 30 feet away. He was pronounced dead at Christiana Hospital.
Pensky, 67, has owned Favors Liquor Store for more than two years.
Before that, he owned another liquor store for 10 years in northeast Wilmington.
Because both neighborhoods are among the poorest and most violent in the city, Pensky and his employees are well armed.
In addition to the .40-caliber Glock pistol the clerk used in the shooting, police confiscated two guns and a can of Mace in the tiny store that weren't involved in the robbery. One is a .380-caliber pistol kept under the counter in a cigar box and the other is a 12-gauge shotgun kept in a corner.
The man who died was identified Wednesday as 20-year-old Kendel Miller of the 500 block of W. 39th St. in Wilmington. The other man escaped.
Pensky was at his Pike Creek home when the robbery took place around 9:30 p.m. He went to the store and then to the police station.
Pensky said his employee fired because Miller was turning toward him with a gun.
"He knew he was about to get shot," Pensky said. "There was no choice."
Though the investigation isn't complete, it appears the clerk was defending himself, said Wilmington police Master Sgt. Steven Barnes. He also said it's legal to carry nonconcealed weapons in a business and no permits are required.
The weapons are all tools of the trade when it comes to running a liquor store in Wilmington's toughest neighborhoods, Pensky said. When he opened the store Wednesday morning, it still had blood in the doorway. And Pensky had his .38 Sig Sauer pistol hanging from his belt.
"I don't do it to show off; I do it to say to people, 'Please, I don't want any trouble,' " Pensky said.
"I love the liquor business, but it comes with two very wanted, dangerous commodities -- booze and cash," he said.
Pensky only had to fire his gun once before when his High Spirit liquor store at 24th and Jessup streets was robbed several years ago, he said. He fired warning shots into the air and the robbers fled.
Favors was robbed once before since Pensky has owned it. It happened around closing, which Pensky thinks is the most dangerous time, because money from an entire day's work is there.
The store has a video surveillance system, but Pensky said a power surge rendered it inoperable about a month ago and he hasn't gotten it repaired yet, so there is no video of Tuesday's robbery.
Delaware State Police Senior Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh said the department doesn't take a stand on whether it's a good idea for merchants to arm themselves.
"But we do advise that it's always better to comply with someone's demands than to put themselves into harm's way," he said.
Wilmington Councilman Steve Martelli, a former city police officer, said it's not uncommon for small business owners in Wilmington to be armed, especially if they run a business that deals with a lot of cash.
"When I was on the force, we always hoped that they would be responsible gun owners by taking marksmanship and gun safety courses," he said. "We didn't want people out there untrained, trying to be renegades or vigilantes."
Police Chief Michael Szczerba agreed.

"If business owners are going to arm themselves, they should do it in a safe and responsible manner," he said.
Pensky said he had to Mace a regular customer about three weeks ago when he lunged at him in a threatening way. Wednesday, the customer was back at the store and had a friendly conversation with Pensky. "All was forgiven a couple days after the Macing," Pensky said.
Pensky, who is white, said he enjoys interacting with his clientele, which he said is mostly poor and black.
"I go across the street to say hello," he said. "If anything bad happens to someone's family around here, I send them a case of beer and a half-gallon of gin."
But there are sad parts of his business as well.
A 47-year-old customer comes in each morning shaking from alcohol withdrawal before his first half-pint of vodka of the day. Pensky said the man looks older than he is, even though he is 30 years younger.
Mostly, though, Pensky said he has a grand time joking around with his customers.
"I love the liquor business because 99.9 percent of my customers are fantastic," he said. "My wife says I get an adrenaline rush when I'm living on the edge."
Another clerk, Shantae Hughes, 27, was in the back room when Tuesday's robbery took place. She also was present last week when her brother was shot on West Fourth Street. Her brother thought he was about to get into a fistfight, but the other man pulled out a gun and shot him.
His wounds are not life-threatening, she said.
Hughes was back at work Wednesday.
"It's been rough, but I have strong people in my life, so I'm getting through it," she said.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHER GETS 30 YEARS (WILNJ)
By Esteban Parra, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
A 42-year-old New Castle man was sentenced Wednesday to 30 years in prison for producing child pornography, including at least one video and thousands of still images.
In addition to the prison term, District Judge Joseph J. Farnan Jr. sentenced William A. Phillips to 10 years probation. He also will have to register as a sex offender.
Farnan said he found the "criminal conduct to be horrendous" and that Phillips had "raped [his child victim] for the camera."
According to federal attorneys, investigators recovered more than 500 videos and 200,000 images of child pornography stored on some 20 CDs and a computer hard drive.
Most of the illicit videos and images were downloaded from the Internet but several hundred were pictures Phillips took of "Jane Doe 1" at the home that belonged to his family outside Llangollen Estates.
Prosecutors said Jane Doe 1 was located and is safe.
There also was at least one illicit video of Jane Doe 1, apparently created by Phillips, with another female child that was recovered by police. In that case, authorities also believe the child has been accounted for and is safe.
Phillips, who said he had been a pressman at the Cecil Whig newspaper in Elkton for more than 20 years, pleaded guilty in March to one count each of production of child pornography and possession of child pornography.
"While the volume and content of the images seized in this case was shocking in itself, the defendant's willingness to exploit very young children entrusted to his supervision and care is unconscionable," U.S. Attorney David Weiss said. "The sentence imposed ensures that this defendant will never again victimize a child and sends a clear message to others who would engage in similar conduct."

DRIVER ALIVE AFTER HIS PICKUP IS HIT BY TRAIN (WILNJ)
By Terri Sanginiti, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
A 30-year-old New Castle area man suffered minor injuries when he ignored flashing lights at a railroad crossing on Del. 9 and his vehicle was hit by a train, police said.
The 10:15 a.m. crash shut down Del. 9 south of Del. 141 in both directions for nearly two hours,

New Castle City police Lt. Adam Brams said.
Jarrod Penn, of the 100 block of Covington Place, was driving a Ford F-150 north on Del. 9 approaching the railroad tracks, when he drove over them and was hit by the train.
His truck was mangled and overturned, but Penn managed to get out, Brams said.
He was treated on the scene by county paramedics for abrasions to his head, and injuries to his chest and abdomen, county paramedic Assistant Chief Richard D. Krett said.
He was listed in stable condition.
Witnesses told police the Norfolk Southern train was blowing its whistle as it approached the road at 20-30 mph. The engineer told police the lights were flashing, but that has not been confirmed by witnesses.
Penn was cited for disregarding a traffic control device.

POLICE INVESTIGATE TWO NEWARK HEISTS (WILNJ)
By Ira Porter, The News Journal
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
Newark police are investigating two robberies that occurred within hours of each other.
The first took place Tuesday at 8:15 p.m. in the Cherry Hill Manor neighborhood, off Barksdale Road. An 18-year-old man and a 19-year-old woman were walking near Nathan Hale and Ethan Allen courts when a man ran up. He put a gun to the 18-year-old's head, forced him to the ground and took money from his pockets, police said. He briefly pointed the gun at the woman before running.
No description was provided except that the man wore a dark hooded jacket or sweat shirt and was 6 feet tall.
The second robbery involved a University of Delaware student on Prospect Avenue early Wednesday morning.
Shortly after 2:30 a.m., the 21-year-old victim parked his car and was walking to a friend's house when he noticed he was being followed. Police said he ran to the porch of his friend's home and while he was waiting to be let in, the thief approached him, stuck a sharp object in his back and demanded money. The student then hit the thief on the head and ran toward nearby Wilbur Street.
The victim noticed a wrench in the assailant's hand as he ran off, police said.
The thief was described as in his mid-20s, 6 feet tall, with an average build and facial hair. He wore a white hooded sweat shirt, a tan zippered jacket with tan, brown and white stripes down the sleeves, blue polyester shorts and white sneakers.
Police do not think the robberies are related.
Anyone with information about either case is asked to contact Detective Michael Watson at 366-7110, ext. 133, or e-mail michael.watson@-cj.state.de.us. Anonymous tips can be sent to Crime Stoppers at (800) TIP-3333.

N.J. MAN SAYS HIS LIFE RUINED BY LINK TO PROSTITUTES' SLAYINGS (WILNJ/AP)
By Wayne Parry, Associated Press
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP, N.J. -- "We know you did it."
That's what investigators told Terry Oleson, convinced he was the person who killed four prostitutes and left them face-down in a drainage ditch just outside Atlantic City.
Three years and three DNA samples later, Oleson hasn't been charged. Neither has anyone else in the case, which illuminated the seedy side of the nation's second-largest gambling market.
Friday is the third anniversary of the discovery of the bodies. As families of the victims grieve, Oleson also struggles. He hears whispers, gets strange looks and recently learned of the suspicion from the parents whose children play at his sister's house.
"It's ruined my life," the 37-year-old Salem County handyman said this week. "It's definitely there. I get people looking at me all the time: 'Oh, that's the guy from TV!'
"They didn't charge anybody, but they sure the hell made it look like I was the one," he said.
Oleson denies having anything to do with the killings of Barbara Breidor, Molly Jean Dilts, Kim Raffo and Tracy Ann Roberts, a former resident of Delaware, and said he hopes the killer will be caught.
Prosecutors never publicly labeled Oleson a suspect in the case, but investigators did question

him extensively shortly after the bodies were found on Nov. 20, 2006, following a number of troubling leads.
He had been staying in the Golden Key Motel in Egg Harbor Township just before the bodies were discovered behind it. Authorities later discovered a network of hidden cameras in his Alloway Township home, and he admitted using them to secretly record his then-girlfriend's 15-year-old daughter in various states of undress.
After seven hours of questioning that began innocuously enough, Oleson said the tone abruptly changed. He says one of them told him, "We know you did it."
"I thought, 'Man, you guys are really friggin' stupid,'" Oleson said.
He was arrested four days later on an invasion-of-privacy charge, and came home to find that authorities had ransacked his house looking for evidence.
It didn't help that an acknowledged prostitute told police -- and any reporter who would listen -- that Oleson confessed to her that he had killed several women. She later recanted at a news conference and apologized to him.
A judge in the videotaping case commented that bail should be high, noting that "a suspect or person of interest in four homicides" is a flight risk. The same judge months later said in court that those circumstances no longer existed.
Oleson served six months in jail for the videotaping and apologized to the victim.
Before he was sentenced, Oleson gave authorities three DNA samples, hoping it would prove his innocence in the prostitute deaths case.
"The very first time I met this guy at the jail, he offered to take a lie-detector test, and give a DNA sample," said his attorney, James Leonard Jr. "I thought, 'Either this guy is the dumbest serial killer in history, or he's totally innocent.' I have no doubt it's the latter."
Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel told the Associated Press last year that DNA evidence can degrade to the point of being unusable after being in the water for a prolonged period. The victims had all been in the water for several days or more before being discovered.
Housel said in a statement Wednesday that his office is still actively pursuing the case, and has recently assigned more investigators to look into the killings.
He would not answer specific questions about Oleson or any other aspect of the case.
Hugh Auslander, Raffo's husband, said he has not heard anything about the case from authorities in the past year.
"I don't think they have anything at all," he said. "This has caused nothing but misery for me, so I'm trying to just move on with my life at this point."
Auslander said he's not sure what to make of Oleson and doesn't know whether to suspect him any longer.
"After Terry Oleson, everything just fell apart," he said.
Relatives of the other three victims did not respond to interview requests.
Years-old documentaries on the case are still shown on cable TV, and Oleson says they still cause him problems.
His next-door neighbor works with his sister, and their children play together in each other's houses.
"Three weeks ago, that thing was back on TV, and the next day the kid comes over and says, 'Mom says the door has to be open while I'm over here playing,' " Oleson said. "The kid still has to check in every half-hour now."

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL EDITORIALS:

CHINA'S CLEAR, TOUGH MESSAGE: CLEAN UP YOUR FINANCIAL MESS (WILNJ)
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
Americans should take a closer look at what Chinese leaders signaled to President Barack Obama on his trip to Asia this week. In some friendly (and some not-so-friendly) ways, the United States was told to get its financial house in order. Despite the talk of friendship, the Chinese were letting the United States know they do not approve of our current economic policy.
We have to realize that the United States is at an enormous disadvantage when it comes to China. China is America's largest creditor. As one economist put it, "never before has the United States relied so heavily on another country's government for financing."

China holds about $1.5 trillion in U.S. debt. That's up from less than $100 billion at the beginning of 2001. Holding that much debt makes the Chinese worry about the debt's value and about the U.S. system as a whole. China has changed from buying long-term Treasury notes to short-term notes. That is seen as a sign that the Chinese fear U.S. inflation, a development that would help America pay its bills in inflated dollars.
In addition, China's financial officials are beginning to lecture Americans about the fall of the dollar and the rising deficit. China's chief banking regulator criticized the United States for its low interest rates, because the continued borrowing could drive down the debt's value, leading to more strain on trade. The Chinese have even used the president's trip to question the United States' ability to pay for its health care reform.
President Obama urged the Chinese government to allow the yuan to rise, a move that would help the U.S. debt. America and other countries believe the Chinese are manipulating their currency, holding down its buying power. But the Chinese, because they now can, ignored the president.
We can expect worse in the future until we clean up our financial mess.

SUCH GALLING WASTE REQUIRES VIGILANCE IN TRACKING SPENDING (WILNJ)
Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009
At first read, it seems like such a paltry figure. In all, about 5 percent of federal spending this fiscal year was improper.
But percentages fail to depict the true cost of waste: The federal government spent more than $98 billion improperly, much of it on questionable claims for tax credits and Medicare benefits. Even in non-recessionary times, that picture is absolutely intolerable. More unacceptable is the $26 billion increase in improper payments the previous year.
Unfortunately, government waste has become a normal expenditure of the federal budget. The hair wringing, which heightens during election season, has done little to curb this disrespect of the taxpayer's trust.
Sen. Tom Carper thinks the numbers released Tuesday may be just the tip of the iceberg, because they are based on estimates for several programs, such as Medicare's prescription drug plan. He's right -- most of private industry would never tolerate such losses, with or without deficits. Nor should we.
Next week President Barack Obama plans to sign an executive order to eliminate the squandering, fraud and waste in government spending.
Federal agencies will have to maintain a Web site that tracks improper payments, error rates and outstanding payments. Directors of agencies who don't meet targets to reduce the error rates for two years in a row will have to begin reporting to the Office of Management and Budget. Penalties on government contractors who get payments they haven't earned will be used as incentives to get the money returned.
Here's hoping this new level of fiscal transparency meets a better end than similar promises by this administration to provide a government that is opened and accountable to taxpayers.

BIDEN IN THE NEWS:

SENATE HEALTH PLAN SEEKS TO ADD COVERAGE TO 31 MILLION (NYT)
By Robert Pear And David M. Herszenhorn
New York Times, November 19, 2009
WASHINGTON - Democratic leaders in the Senate unveiled their proposal on Wednesday for overhauling the health care system, outlining legislation that they said would cover most of the uninsured while reducing the federal budget deficit.
Mr. Reid walked into a meeting on the health care bill.
Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, said at an evening news conference that the legislation, which represents President Obama's signature domestic initiative and will be subject to lengthy and heated debate on the Senate floor, would impose new regulations on insurers, extend coverage to 31 million people who currently do not have any and add new benefits to Medicare.
And he said the bill, despite having a price tag of $849 billion over 10 years, would still reduce projected budget deficits by $127 billion over a decade because the costs would be more than offset by new taxes and reductions in government spending, particularly on Medicare.

Democrats expressed confidence that they would have the votes necessary to move forward when the legislation hits its first test in the Senate, probably on Saturday, in the form of a procedural hurdle that will require a united front from all 58 Democrats and the two independents aligned with them.

In one last touch on Wednesday, Mr. Reid and his aides finally named their 2,074-page bill: the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Mr. Reid wrote the legislation in the last several weeks, combining parts of two previous bills adopted by Senate committees. The House passed its version of the health care legislation earlier this month.

Calling the bill "impressive," the White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, said: "This legislation meets the president's objectives, provides protection from insurance companies, contains true cost controls and extends coverage to working families."

"We all know that this legislation is tremendously important," Mr. Reid said at the news conference. "Why? Because it saves lives, it saves money."

The measure includes a government-run insurance plan, or public option, with a provision allowing states to opt out.

Though broadly similar to the bill adopted by the House, Mr. Reid's bill differs in important ways. Democrats said that it would increase the Medicare payroll tax on high-income people and would impose a new excise tax on high-cost "Cadillac" health plans offered by employers to their employees.

The Medicare payroll tax would rise to 1.95 percent from 1.45 percent for couples earning more than $250,000 a year, and individuals earning more than $200,000, Democrats said. The increase would raise $54 billion over 10 years.

The tax on so-called Cadillac plans, first proposed by the Senate Finance Committee, would apply to individual insurance policies costing more than $8,500 and family plans costing more than $23,000, raising $149 billion toward the cost of the bill. Mr. Reid's proposal scales back the tax on Cadillac plans proposed by the Finance Committee.

Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Democrat, said an important procedural vote to begin debate on the legislation would most likely take place on Saturday, before senators leave town for a weeklong Thanksgiving break.

Mr. Durbin also challenged the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, to post the Republican version of health care legislation on the Internet. Senate Republicans said they would fight the Democrats' bill at every turn, but they have also said they have no intention of offering a full alternative bill.

Republicans promised a fierce floor fight, including a raft of amendments.

"It's going to be a holy war," said Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Republican of Utah, who is one of his party's most respected voices on health policy but for the last several months has voiced nothing but fury over the Democrats' efforts.

Senate Democratic leaders spent much of Wednesday still trying frantically to nail down the final votes needed to begin debate on the legislation.

At least two potential Democratic holdouts, Senator Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana and Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska, signaled on Wednesday that they were open to supporting a motion to begin debate.

But Mr. Nelson emerged from the Democratic caucus meeting saying he still had not made up his mind. "I still don't have anything that I want to say because I have not had a chance to review the bill, and I only would be going on the basis of outline and that's not enough information," he said.

Senator Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas is the third Democrat who has not made a commitment to moving the bill ahead.

If the Democrats succeed in pulling together the needed votes, the Senate intends to devote most of December to a rollicking, unpredictable debate that could determine the fate of legislation that Mr. Obama has declared to be his top domestic priority.

Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, both former senators, were on Capitol Hill on Wednesday, trying to help Mr. Reid round up votes.

Several Democratic senators emerged from the meeting saying that Mr. Reid had made substantial improvements in combining two versions of health care legislation, one passed by the health committee in July and another by the Finance Committee in October.

"He really did an exceptionally good job," said Senator Kent Conrad, Democrat of North Dakota, who is a lead author of the Finance Committee bill. Mr. Conrad, who is the chairman of the Budget Committee, noted that Mr. Reid's bill would reduce future federal deficits more than the House-passed bill or the earlier Senate measures.
"I would give Leader Reid very high marks," he said.
Mr. Reid's bill would not go as far as the House-passed bill in limiting insurance coverage for abortions. Democratic senators said that the bill seeks to extend current law by barring the use of federal money for abortions. But it would also require that at least one insurance plan that covers abortion and one that does not cover abortion be offered in every state.
In seeking to broadly expand health coverage, Mr. Reid's bill would require people to obtain health insurance. Senators said that the bill would impose a complicated set of penalties for people who fail to meet the requirement.
Mr. Reid's bill would create a voluntary federal program to provide long-term care insurance and cash benefits to people with severe disabilities. The program, known as Community Living Assistance Services and Supports, would be financed with premiums.
The premiums would be set to cover the full cost of the benefits, which, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would average $75 a day. The House-passed bill includes similar provisions.
Carl Hulse contributed reporting.

REID SETS MARKERS FOR HISTORIC HEALTH CARE DEBATE (NYT/AP)
By The Associated Press
New York Times, November 19, 2009
Filed at 9:37 p.m. ET
WASHINGTON (AP) -- Setting up a historic year-end health care debate, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled long-awaited legislation Wednesday night to extend coverage to all but 6 percent of eligible Americans and bar private industry from denying insurance because of pre-existing medical conditions.
The Democrat's $849 billion measure is designed to remake the nation's health care system, relying on cuts in future Medicare spending to cover costs -- as well as on higher payroll taxes for the well-to-do and a new levy on patients undergoing elective cosmetic surgery.
Aides said the mammoth, 2,074-page bill would reduce deficits by $127 billion over a decade and by as much as $650 billion in the 10 years that follow, citing as-yet-unreleased estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.
"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey," said Nevada Sen. Reid, less than two weeks after the House approved its version of a sweeping remake of the health care system-- and nearly 10 months after President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day summons to action.
Obama welcomed Reid's action, saying, "Today, thanks to the Senate's hard work, we're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems. I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible." There was no mention of Obama's longtime goal of signing legislation by year's end.
Republicans vowed a protracted struggle to block the legislation and deny the president a victory that would cap a tumultuous first year in office.
"This bill has been behind closed doors for weeks," said Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader. "Now, it's America's turn, and this will not be a short debate. Higher premiums, tax increases and Medicare cuts to pay for more government. The American people know that is not reform."
An early showdown on the Senate floor is expected by week's end.
Reid's Senate measure would require most Americans to carry health insurance and would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to help those at lower incomes afford it. It also would mandate that large companies to provide coverage to their workers.
Beginning in 2014, it would set up new insurance marketplaces -- called exchanges -- primarily for those who now have a hard time getting or keeping coverage. Consumers would have the choice of purchasing government sold insurance, an attempt to hold down prices charged by private insurers.
After weeks of secretive drafting, Reid outlined the legislation to rank-and-file Democratic senators

at a closed-door meeting. "Everyone was positive," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.
That didn't mean there weren't problems -- far from it. At his news conference, Reid pointedly refrained from saying he had the 60 votes necessary to propel the bill over its first hurdle.
Reid met privately earlier in the day with Sens. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, moderate Democrats who have expressed concerns about the measure.
Nelson later issued a statement strongly suggesting he would vote with fellow Democrats on an initial showdown expected within days. Aides have said privately that Reid decided to retain an existing antitrust exemption for the insurance industry as a way of satisfying the Nebraskan's concerns.
Landrieu said, "I'm not going to be for anything that doesn't drive down costs over time."
Lincoln, the only one of the three who faces re-election next year, told reporters, "We'll wait and see."
With the support of two independents, Democrats have 60 seats, the precise number needed to choke off any delaying tactics by the 40 Republicans who appear united in opposition to the bill in its current form.
In general, Reid proposed an outline that is similar to the House-passed bill, but there were important differences.
He called for an increase of a half percentage point in the Medicare payroll tax for individuals with income over $200,000 a year, $250,000 for couples.
He also included a tax on high-value insurance policies, meant to curb the appetite for expensive care.
The House bill contains neither of those two provisions, relying on an income tax surcharge on the wealthy to finance an expansion of coverage.
Reid's measure also calls for hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in future Medicare spending, an attempt to satisfy Obama's call to curtail the growth of health care spending that is fiercely opposed by Republicans.
On another controversial issue, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., told reporters Reid had decided to require the side-by-side sale of insurance policies that cover abortion services and do not, an attempt to satisfy both sides. That is far less restrictive than a House-passed provision that left liberal Democrats angry.
Ahead lie weeks -- if not more -- of unpredictable maneuvering on the Senate floor, where Reid and his allies will seek to incorporate changes sought by Democrats and repel attempts by Republicans to defeat the legislation and inflict a significant political defeat on the president.
Reid released his legislation more than a week after the House approved its version of the health care bill on a near party-line vote of 220-215.
According to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, that House bill, with a price tag of about $1.2 trillion, would result in coverage for tens of millions of uninsured, and provide 96 percent of the eligible population with insurance.
Two Senate committees approved different versions earlier in the year, and while Reid has said he would produce a blend of the two proposals, in fact he had a virtual free hand to come up with a plan that could command the 60 votes needed to pass.
Anticipating a major struggle, the White House deputized Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to join Vice President Joe Biden in trying to clear the way for the bill's approval over the next several weeks.
Salazar, a former Colorado senator, is viewed as a bridge to moderate Democrats who are far outnumbered by liberals inside the Democratic caucus.
Daschle was Obama's first choice for secretary of health and human services, a position from which he was to try and oversee the administration's drive to enact health care legislation. He withdrew his nomination when it was disclosed he had not paid more than $120,000 in federal taxes over several years.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Erica Werner contributed to this report.

SENATE HEALTH BILL IS UNVEILED (WSJ)
Reid Outlines $849 Billion Plan; Tradeoffs Include Stiffer Medicare Tax on High Incomes

By Greg Hitt And Janet Adamy
Wall Street Journal, November 19, 2009
WASHINGTON -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, propelling action on President Barack Obama's top domestic priority, unveiled Wednesday a ten-year $849 billion bill that would overhaul the nation's health-care system and extend insurance to 31 million Americans without coverage. The 2,074-page legislation represents the Nevada Democrat's first attempt to build consensus among Senate Democratic liberals and centrists, as well as the two independents allied with the party.
One swing Democrat, Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, said he still has a range of concerns but suggested he might at least be willing to begin debate. "If you don't like the bill, then why would you block your own opportunity to amend it?" he said. Two other Democrats on the fence, Sen. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, remained noncommittal Wednesday evening.
The nonpartisan Congressional Budget office estimated the bill would ensure that 94% of those living in the U.S., not counting unauthorized immigrants, have insurance coverage, several Senate Democratic aides said. CBO previously estimated about 83% of Americans now have insurance.
The Senate measure would reduce the federal budget deficit by $127 billion over the next decade, and by $650 billion over the second ten years of the program. It achieves that in part through a new Medicare payroll tax and a tax on high-value insurance plans.
The $849 billion price tag comes in below the $1.05 trillion cost of the health overhaul passed by the House this month, and the prospect of additional deficit reduction may raise chances fiscally conservative Democrats will back the package. But the figures aren't likely to win over Republicans, who say the bill adds costly new benefits for some Americans when the federal debt is reaching new heights.
Other hurdles to passage in the full Senate include fractures between liberal and conservative Democrats over a government-run insurance plan and disputes over how the bill should treat abortion.
"This is yet another trillion-dollar experiment, but it is not what Americans bargained for," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.).
Among other things, the Senate legislation would create a new government-run health insurance plan to compete with private insurers. States would be allowed the option of not participating, and the plan would negotiate payment rates directly with health-care providers, rather than tying payments to Medicare's low rates. Those were concessions to centrists worried about government's footprint in the private sector.
The bill would also create government subsidies to help individuals and families comply with a mandate to buy insurance, and would sharply expand Medicaid, the federal-state health insurance program for the poor.
Journal Community
discuss
" OK, Mr. Reid. And the tooth fairy is going to leave a million dollars under my pillow tonight. " - Bruce D. Gulick
Mr. Obama said the legislation would help fix the problems of rising insurance premiums, increasing medical costs and the instability felt by those who lack insurance. "We're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems," he said.
Mr. Reid huddled with Democrats for weeks to hammer out details of the bill, and his decision to move forward Wednesday sets the stage for a pivotal vote, perhaps Friday or Saturday, that will determine whether the Senate can formally open debate on the bill.
"Tonight represents the last leg of this journey we've been on for a while now," Mr. Reid said. He met Wednesday with Vice President Joe Biden, and many Democrats voiced hope the majority leader will be able to secure the votes needed to overcome Republican opposition and move to the debate.
"We're going to clear the hurdles," said Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic standard-bearer in 2004. But the outcome remains uncertain. "I'm not going to assume a single vote," said Illinois Sen. Richard Durbin, the Democratic whip.
The coming showdown looms as the first of several votes over the next month that will test Mr. Reid's ability to hold together liberals and centrists. Republicans contend Democrats are trying to

rush action on the bill before the American public, already uneasy, turns completely against the White House-backed initiative.
On the floor, there could be at least a half-dozen points where Republicans-if they use every stalling tactic available-could force Mr. Reid to muster 60 votes to move the bill along, said congressional aides.
Mr. Reid decided to pare back a proposed tax on high-value insurance plans, bowing to liberal and union complaints that the measure would hit middle-class families. Under his proposal, the tax would fall on plans valued at more than $23,000 for couples, up from $21,000 in legislation written by the Senate Finance Committee. The tax was estimated to raise $149 billion over ten years, far less than was envisioned earlier this year.
To help make up for the lost revenue, Mr. Reid inserted a provision that would raise Medicare payroll taxes on couples with income of more than $250,000 a year. For those families, the levy would be raised to 1.95%, up from 1.45%. Overall, the proposal would bring in $54 billion over ten years. Mr. Reid is also proposing a new tax on elective cosmetic surgery, generating $5 billion.
Both the House and Senate bills make hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in spending on Medicare. But the two chambers differ on how to raise revenue. The House legislation relies largely on an income surtax on the wealthy. The Senate bill would raise money across a range of health care sources.
Insurers and drug companies, for example, would be hit with tens of billions in new fees. So would medical device makers, though the proposed levy on device makers was lowered to $20 billion, down about half from the Senate Finance Committee bill.
Still to be fought out on the Senate floor is the issue of abortion.
The Senate bill provides wider insurance coverage for abortion than the House legislation. Among other things, the Senate's proposal would allow women who receive government subsidies to buy insurance to enroll in a plan that covers abortion, while the House bill would bar that. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R., Utah) said he wanted to force the Senate to vote on whether to adopt the House limits. "We'll have a major debate," he said.
Write to Greg Hitt at greg.hitt@wsj.com and Janet Adamy at janet.adamy@wsj.com

REID BILL WILL COST $849 BILLION (POL)
By Carrie Budoff Brown And Manu Raju
Politico, November 19, 2009
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid scrambled Wednesday to pull together 60 votes for his health reform bill - and his effort got a boost from congressional scorekeepers, who said his plan would cost $849 billion over 10 years, comfortably below the president's $900 billion limit.
The Congressional Budget Office also gave Reid some good news on the deficit - saying his plan would reduce the deficit by $127 billion in deficit reduction in the first 10 years and $650 billion in the second decade. It would cover 94 percent of all Americans.
Reid was briefing the Democratic caucus on details of his bill at 5 p.m. and it's expected to include a public option, with a chance for states to opt-out of coverage; a mandate requiring individuals to own insurance; and subsidies to help low- and middle-income Americans buy coverage.
Now Reid must hope moderate Democrats who hold the key to reform will agree to go ahead with a key test vote on the bill as early as Saturday, and Reid spent the day Wednesday wooing these fence-sitters.
But he got some positive soundings from centrist Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson, who put out a news release to remind voters that a vote to go ahead with debate on the bill Saturday doesn't equate to a vote in support of the bill. It seemed an indication that Nelson was willing to give Reid his vote on the motion to start debate.
Getting those 60 votes on what amounts to a procedural vote, however, has proven challenging for Reid, with two other key moderates, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, still not on record committing to vote for proceeding to debate.
At around 2:15 p.m., the three moderate Democratic holdouts - Nelson, Landrieu and Lincoln - entered Reid's office for a briefing.
"He is walking through the particulars with them," said Reid's spokesman, Jim Manley. "We need 60 votes to get this bill to the floor."
Vice President Biden held court for more than three hours in a room off the Senate floor. Interior

Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle were also dispatched to the Capitol by President Barack Obama to lobby senators.
As expected, moderates were the focal point. Salazar ate lunch with Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) in the Senate dining room. Lincoln (D-Ark.) hustled into the Senate reception room for a sitdown with Biden, but she emerged without making any public commitments.
"We're still counting. Harry is still counting and working," Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).
Adding to the uncertainty Wednesday was the absence of Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who flew back to Montana to deal with a family emergency. With no margin for error, Reid needs Baucus present for the first vote.
Durbin said he was hopeful Baucus would return for the vote.
Reid said Tuesday that he is "cautiously optimistic" he can secure the 60 votes he needs to move forward on the bill by this weekend. Reid's bill is expected to include a national government insurance plan with a provision for states to opt out. Reid is also expected to adjust a 40 percent excise tax on high-value insurance plans by raising the threshold at which insurers would pay the fee. He's expected to make up for that lost revenue by proposing an expansion of the Medicare payroll tax.

REID PLAN UPS PRESSURE ON MODERATES (POL)
By Carrie Budoff Brown
Politico, November 19, 2009
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled his $849 billion health reform bill Wednesday to broad support from fellow Democrats - and the move quickly turned up the pressure on the last few wavering moderates to support the plan, which includes a sizable chunk of deficit cutting.
Reid's plan would expand coverage to 94 percent of Americans through a government-run health insurance option - allowing states to opt out - and other features, all while reducing future federal deficits by $127 billion over the next 10 years, according to Senate aides briefed by the Congressional Budget Office.
"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey" to bring health reform to the nation, Reid said in announcing the bill.
But Reid's plan contains considerable differences from House legislation passed earlier this month - with a more limited public option and different ways to pay for the bill. Reid included an excise tax on insurers who offer "Cadillac" health plans, not the "millionaire's tax" that's in the House bill.
And one of the biggest differences between the bills - on language restricting federal funding for abortion - could prove problematic for Reid. His bill doesn't include as many limits as the House bill and already is drawing fire from anti-abortion activists.
Democrats on Wednesday were clearly hoping that the deficit figures - the biggest deficit reduction of any health bill to date, Reid's office noted - would knock down one of the last remaining obstacles to winning the votes of key centrists, at least to go ahead with debate on the bill as early as this weekend. Reid's office said the bill could reduce the deficit by $650 billion in its second 10 years.
And, in fact, the strategy seemed to be working. Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson and Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu both sounded more positive about voting to allow debate to proceed.
Nelson told reporters he still had problems with the public option plan - he prefers a plan that would allow states to opt in instead - but signaled he'd wage that fight on the floor. He also made clear the vote to allow debate wouldn't be the final fight on the bill.
"There will be opportunities to amend the legislation, and if it is amended to the satisfaction of several people, then it will have enough votes to pass on the back end," Nelson said. "If not, it won't. That is the risk."
Other centrists sounded positive toward the bill. "If the bottom line is what it appears to be, that's an encouraging thing. ... But you've got to trust but verify," said Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), who said he would vote to allow debate.
One holdout appeared to be Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, who faces a tough reelection fight next fall. On her way in to the briefing with Reid, Lincoln was asked how she will vote on the motion to proceed: "We'll wait and see," she said.
Reid's hopes of calling a vote to proceed with debate as early as Friday seemed to fade, but a Saturday vote remained a possibility. But he has no margin for error, needing all 58 Democrats

and two independents to block any move toward a filibuster and bring the bill to the floor.
And over the course of Wednesday, the announcement of the plan emerged as a key test of his leadership and vote-corralling abilities - with President Barack Obama dispatching Vice President Joe Biden back to his old Senate haunts to help.
Adding to the uncertainty Wednesday was the absence of Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, who flew back to Montana to deal with a family emergency.
Beyond the moderates, Democrats praised Reid's effort to thread the needle with a bill that will keep costs lower than Obama's target of $900 billion, reins in deficit spending and still expands coverage to more than 31 million Americans. The reimbursement rates for the public plan will not be tied to Medicare, and co-ops will still be offered.
As for the $650 billion estimate, it grows out of a calculation by the CBO that the Senate Finance Committee bill would reduce the deficit by one-fourth to one-half percent of gross domestic product over its second 10 years. Finance Committee officials converted that to $650 billion to $1.3 trillion, and Reid's office believes his bill to be in the one-fourth range and maybe higher - leading to the claim of $650 billion.
The Senate bill pushes back implementation of major parts of reform to 2014 -- a shift from both the House and the Senate Finance Committee bill, which created 2013 effective dates.
This is bad news for lawmakers who will need to explain to constituents why the elements that have attracted the most attention -- the public plan, the Medicaid expansion and the insurance exchanges -- won't be available for four years. Some reforms would kick in earlier, Senate aides explained, but the big pieces would still be a ways off.
Reid sought to sidestep hot-button issues that could cause trouble for the bill. Illegal immigrants will not get health benefits under the bill, and it would restrict taxpayer funding of abortion - an issue that almost derailed the House bill.
Abortion rights supporters were quick to praise the language Reid included in the bill, which was an early warning sign that it doesn't go far enough for some in the anti-abortion community who led the effort to amend the House bill.
The National Right to Life Committee slammed the language as "unacceptable."
"Reid seeks to cover elective abortions in two big new federal health programs, but tries to conceal that unpopular reality with layers of contrived definitions and hollow bookkeeping requirements," NRLC Legislative Director Douglas Johnson said in a statement.
Other Democrats praised Reid's efforts.
Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass), who was concerned about the tax on Cadillac benefits, praised Reid for raising the limits to policies costing $23,000 for a family and $8,500 for an individual. "They moved, and I like the new numbers. It is closer to where I first began. ... I think we are going pass this legislation."
Kerry also praised Reid's efforts to reduce the tax on medical device manufacturers to $20 billion, down from $40 billion, over 10 years.
The Reid bill would increase the Medicare payroll tax on couples who earn more than $250,000 and individuals that earn $200,000 from 1.45 percent to 1.95 percent.
The bill levies a 5 percent tax on elective cosmetic surgery. The provision raises $5 billion and was needed to make the numbers work, a Democratic Senate aide said. The Finance Committee considered the tax but dismissed it, in part because it was a public relations battle that senators were not willing to wage.
The Senate bill includes a public insurance option that allows states to choose not to participate. In order to opt-out, states would have to pass a law, the aide said.
The Reid bill only slightly toughens the requirement that people carry insurance. It levies a $95 fine in 2014 and scales up to $750 by 2016. The Senate Finance bill had no penalty in the first year. Critics worry that people will choose to pay the cheaper penalty rather than buying the more expensive insurance plans because the bill also requires insurers to offer coverage to people who are sick. That combination could lead to an older, sicker and more expensive risk pool.
In what can be viewed as an election-year sweetener for senior citizens, the coverage gap in the Medicare prescription drug program would shrink by $500 in 2010 only under the Senate bill. The Senate aide described it as a "down-payment" that would move the Senate closer to the House bill, which eliminates the donut hole over the next decade.
Getting 60 votes on what amounts to a procedural vote has proved challenging for Reid. Biden

held court for more than three hours in a room off the Senate floor. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle were also dispatched to the Capitol by Obama to lobby senators.
As expected, moderates were the focal point. Salazar ate lunch with Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) in the Senate dining room. Lincoln hustled into the Senate reception room for a sit-down with Biden, but she emerged without making any public commitments.
"We're still counting. Harry is still counting and working," said Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).
Manu Raju, Patrick O'Connor, Chris Frates and Jake Sherman contributed to this story.
Be a part of the daily political debate with PROJECT POLITICO powered by YouTube. Click here to submit your video now and be featured on POLITICO.com.

SENATE'S $849 BILLION HEALTH BILL WIDENS COVERAGE, CUTS DEFICIT (BLOOM)
By Laura Litvan And Nicole Gaouette
Bloomberg News, November 19, 2009
Nov. 18 (Bloomberg) -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid released an $849 billion health-care plan that calls for new government competition for private insurers, covers almost all Americans and raises Medicare taxes on the wealthiest people.
Reid's proposal, the most sweeping overhaul of the U.S. health system in four decades, cleared a major hurdle when the Congressional Budget Office said it would cut the federal budget deficit by $127 billion in the first decade. That met a standard set by President Barack Obama and allows Reid to seek a vote as early as Saturday to open the way for Senate debate.
The 2,074-page Senate bill would extend coverage to 94 percent of Americans or some 31 million people, lawmakers said. The House already passed its version on a vote of 220-215 on Nov. 7.
"This legislation is a tremendous step forward," Reid told reporters at the Capitol. "Tonight begins the last leg of this journey."
The measure is intended to both reduce the ranks of the uninsured and curb rising medical costs. Both the House and Senate versions require that Americans get health coverage or pay a penalty, set up online insurance-purchasing exchanges and offer government aid to help lower-income people.
The Senate legislation would reduce the deficit by $650 billion in the second decade, according to preliminary estimates from the nonpartisan CBO cited by lawmakers.
'Good Deal'
Reid is trying to jump-start legislation, which Obama has said he wants to sign into law this year. Reid has cast doubt on that goal after months of setbacks and signs the Republicans want to prolong the debate by using delaying tactics.
"We're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems," Obama said in a statement released by the White House. "I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible."
Reid included a so-called public option program to compete with private insurers such as Hartford, Connecticut-based Aetna Inc. even though it's opposed by all Senate Republicans and some Democrats. He's gambling he can get support to start debate on a bill that's likely to be rewritten by the full Senate.
While the House opted for an income surtax on the wealthiest Americans, much of the funding for the Senate bill will come from a tax on high-end, Cadillac insurance plans, said Senator Kent Conrad, a North Dakota Democrat.
New Taxes
The Cadillac tax would be placed on insurers that offer plans valued at $8,500 for individuals or $23,000 for families, Conrad told reporters. It would have higher thresholds for high- risk workers and people living in states with costlier premiums, Conrad said.
Reid did settle on a Medicare tax increase for some Americans, raising the rate to 1.95 percent from 1.45 percent for couples earning more than $250,000, Conrad said. He also plans a new commission to help set rates paid by Medicare, the government program for the elderly, Conrad said.
The Senate's requirement for employers is also different. Under Reid's bill, companies with 50 or more workers would be subject to penalties if they don't provide coverage and have workers who

get taxpayer funded subsidies to buy policies.
'Class Act'
The Senate bill includes a federally run long-term care insurance plan dubbed the "Class Act" that would let workers pay premiums and then get a cash benefit later for adult day care or assisted living expenses, lawmakers said. It would also bar insurers from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions, and would expand Medicare prescription-drug coverage.
Reid, a Nevada Democrat, has been melding plans passed by the Senate health and finance committees and still faces splits in his party over issues including how to pay for the bill, whether to set up a public option, and how to ensure that federal funds aren't used for abortions.
One of the top Democrats involved in the overhaul effort, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, may be missing the next few days. Baucus flew back to his home state of Montana to be with his ailing mother.
"We'll get him back here when we need him," Reid said.
New York Senator Chuck Schumer, one of the Democratic leaders, told reporters "everything looks good" for an initial vote to start debate. At least three Democrats --Senators Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas -- had refused to pledge their votes for that step until they could review the bill's text.
'Not Enough'
The bill "is better in some ways than in other ways," Nelson said tonight. "Until I have a chance to go through it, a brief explanation is not enough" to make a conclusion, he said.
Reid met with the three senators this afternoon and got some help from Vice President Joe Biden, who went to Capitol Hill to lobby other senators on the bill. Former senators Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar who now serves as President Barack Obama's Interior Secretary, also met with lawmakers.
To win passage, Reid has to keep all 60 votes controlled by Democrats together. Besides Nelson, Landrieu and Lincoln, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman has been critical of the public option. Lieberman, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, said he would support the vote to start debate and work with lawmakers to strip out the government program.
Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, the only Republican to vote for a health-care plan in the committee phase, said she can't support a public option. She's pushing for a trigger to put a government plan in effect only if there is evidence that policies offered by private insurers are unaffordable.
Time for Debate
Senator Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican, today said it's doubtful any Republican will vote for Reid's plan. He also said Reid should allow enough time for debate.
"We're talking about one-sixth of the economy," Hatch said. "This should be a very deliberative process. And it should take more than a month and a half."
Reid has safeguards to keep federal dollars from funding abortion, though not the restrictions adopted in the House, lawmakers said. Abortion rights supporters have threatened to vote against a final bill if it contains the House language and have been working to keep it out of the Senate version.
If the Senate passes legislation, it would work with the House to come up with compromise legislation for a new round of votes in both chambers before a bill would go to Obama.
"We are now down to the week we have been waiting for," Massachusetts Senator John Kerry told reporters tonight. "This is not just a matter of months in the waiting, this has been decades in the waiting."
To contact the reporters on this story: Laura Litvan in Washington at llitvan@bloomberg.net; Nicole Gaouette in Washington at ngaouette@bloomberg.net

REID PUSHES HOLDOUTS TO VOTE FOR HEALTH BILL DEBATE (UPDATE2) (BLOOM)
By Laura Litvan And Kristin Jensen
Bloomberg News, November 19, 2009
Nov. 18 (Bloomberg) -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid plans to give fellow Democrats details of his proposal to overhaul U.S. health care even as lawmakers raise concerns over issues from abortion to a government-run insurance program.
Reid will meet with Senate Democrats at 5 p.m. Washington time and deliver a summary, North

Dakota Senator Kent Conrad said. The next step is the push to begin debate on the bill, which would require several procedural steps and corralling 60 votes to overcome efforts to block action.
"I feel cautiously optimistic that we can do that," Reid said yesterday.
To keep the 60 votes controlled by Democrats in line, Reid is enlisting the support of former senators including Vice President Joe Biden, who went to Capitol Hill today. Former Senators Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar, who now serves as President Barack Obama's interior secretary, also met with lawmakers.
The legislation, Obama's top domestic priority, is intended to cover tens of millions of uninsured Americans while curbing medical costs. The proposals for purchasing exchanges, subsidies and a requirement that all Americans have coverage would cost more than $800 billion over 10 years and mark the biggest changes to U.S. health care in more than four decades.
'Still Counting'
The House passed its version on a 220-215 vote on Nov. 7. Reid has been waiting for Congressional Budget Office analyses on various proposals drawn up by the Senate health and finance committees before unveiling his plan.
Senator Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat and chairman of the health committee, said the CBO found the cost of "coverage" in the legislation is less than $900 billion. He didn't elaborate. House leaders initially put the cost of their $1.05 trillion bill at $894 billion, a net figure that took into account new revenue such as penalties for not buying insurance.
Reid is "still counting" members and plans to hold a vote on the motion to proceed to debate before the Thanksgiving holiday recess planned for next week, said Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat. The Senate might be in session on both days of the coming weekend, Durbin said.
Baucus Leaves
One of the top Democrats involved in the health-care overhaul, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, may be missing the next few days. Baucus flew back to his home state of Montana to be with his ailing mother, a congressional aide said. The aide said it wouldn't affect the timing of the bill.
A Senate aide familiar with Reid's proposal said the plan will likely include the creation of a federally run long-term care insurance plan dubbed the "Class Act" by its original sponsors, the late Senator Edward Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, and former Senator Michael DeWine, an Ohio Republican.
Under the plan, participating employers would let workers pay premiums into the program, which would offer a cash benefit of between $50 and $75 per day that could be used to pay for adult day care or assisted living expenses. Workers would pay into the plan for five years before receiving benefits.
The idea has drawn critics, who say its success would depend on a growing roster of new premium contributors. Conrad, who is chairman of the budget committee, called the Class Act "a Ponzi scheme of the first order," in an Oct. 27 Washington Post article.
Letter From Economists
The White House weighed in on the legislation last night, releasing a letter sent by 23 economists that outlined four priorities the Senate bill should include.
The economists said the bill should impose an excise tax on high-cost insurance plans; not increase the deficit; set up an independent commission to make binding recommendations on Medicare cuts, and carry out "delivery-system reforms," which would reward health-care providers for "providing better care, not just more care."
Including those elements "will reduce long-term deficits, improve the quality of care, and put the nation on a firm fiscal footing," wrote the economists, who included Princeton University Professors Alan Blinder and Uwe Reinhardt and former Federal Reserve Vice Chairman Alice Rivlin.
While Democrats control 60 Senate votes, Reid can't yet count on them to clear the way for debate.
'Competition-Free Zone'
One Democrat, Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, said his support for proceeding is in doubt unless the government-run insurance program, or public option, is included in the plan.
"I'm not going to support a bill that's a competition- free zone," Wyden told reporters yesterday.

And at least three Democrats -- Senators Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas -- have refused to pledge their votes until they have seen the bill's text.
Reid met with the three senators this afternoon to go over the details of what's in the bill before he introduces it, said Reid spokesman Jim Manley. The first big test vote for the measure may come as early as Nov. 21, Manley said. That would be a vote to end the delaying tactics of opponents who want to bar the measure from getting to the floor for consideration.
One of the most pressing issues for Reid is the public option. Wyden and Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia insist the best way to reduce health costs is to set up the government program to compete with insurers like Hartford, Connecticut-based Aetna Inc.
Carper Compromise
Other Democrats are critical. Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, said he won't vote for a bill that includes the program, though he has said he will support a motion to start debate.
Delaware Senator Tom Carper is crafting a compromise for fellow Democrats that might be offered as a replacement for the public option during floor debate. The "hammer approach" would require states where insurance plans don't meet affordability standards to offer an alternative, national plan run by a nonprofit, Carper told reporters yesterday.
To contact the reporters on this story: Kristin Jensen in Washington at kjensen@bloomberg.net; Laura Litvan in Washington at llitvan@bloomberg.net

REID SETS MARKERS FOR HISTORIC HEALTH CARE DEBATE (AP)
By David Espo, AP Special Correspondent
Associated Press, November 19, 2009
WASHINGTON (AP) -- Setting up a historic year-end health care debate, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled long-awaited legislation Wednesday night to extend coverage to all but 6 percent of eligible Americans and bar private industry from denying insurance because of pre-existing medical conditions.
The Democrat's $849 billion measure is designed to remake the nation's health care system, relying on cuts in future Medicare spending to cover costs - as well as on higher payroll taxes for the well-to-do and a new levy on patients undergoing elective cosmetic surgery.
Aides said the mammoth, 2,074-page bill would reduce deficits by $127 billion over a decade and by as much as $650 billion in the 10 years that follow, citing as-yet-unreleased estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.
"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey," said Nevada Sen. Reid, less than two weeks after the House approved its version of a sweeping remake of the health care system- and nearly 10 months after President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day summons to action.
Obama welcomed Reid's action, saying, "Today, thanks to the Senate's hard work, we're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems. I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible." There was no mention of Obama's longtime goal of signing legislation by year's end.
Republicans vowed a protracted struggle to block the legislation and deny the president a victory that would cap a tumultuous first year in office.
"This bill has been behind closed doors for weeks," said Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader. "Now, it's America's turn, and this will not be a short debate. Higher premiums, tax increases and Medicare cuts to pay for more government. The American people know that is not reform."
An early showdown on the Senate floor is expected by week's end.
Reid's Senate measure would require most Americans to carry health insurance and would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to help those at lower incomes afford it. Medium and large companies would not be required to offer coverage, but they would be forced to pay fees if the government ended up subsidizing their employees' insurance.
Beginning in 2014, the bill would set up new insurance marketplaces - called exchanges - primarily for those who now have a hard time getting or keeping coverage. Consumers would have the choice of purchasing government sold insurance, an attempt to hold down prices charged by private insurers.

After weeks of secretive drafting, Reid outlined the legislation to rank-and-file Democratic senators at a closed-door meeting. "Everyone was positive," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.
That didn't mean there weren't problems - far from it. At his news conference, Reid pointedly refrained from saying he had the 60 votes necessary to propel the bill over its first hurdle.
Reid met privately earlier in the day with Sens. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, moderate Democrats who have expressed concerns about the measure.
Nelson later issued a statement strongly suggesting he would vote with fellow Democrats on an initial showdown expected within days. Aides have said privately that Reid decided to retain an existing antitrust exemption for the insurance industry as a way of satisfying the Nebraskan's concerns.
Landrieu said, "I'm not going to be for anything that doesn't drive down costs over time."
Lincoln, the only one of the three who faces re-election next year, told reporters, "We'll wait and see."
With the support of two independents, Democrats have 60 seats, the precise number needed to choke off any delaying tactics by the 40 Republicans who appear united in opposition to the bill in its current form.
In general, Reid proposed an outline that is similar to the House-passed bill, but there were important differences.
He called for an increase of a half percentage point in the Medicare payroll tax for individuals with income over $200,000 a year, $250,000 for couples.
He also included a tax on high-value insurance policies, meant to curb the appetite for expensive care.
The House bill contains neither of those two provisions, relying on an income tax surcharge on the wealthy to finance an expansion of coverage.
Reid's measure also calls for hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in future Medicare spending, an attempt to satisfy Obama's call to curtail the growth of health care spending that is fiercely opposed by Republicans.
On another controversial issue, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., told reporters Reid had decided to require the side-by-side sale of insurance policies that cover abortion services and do not, an attempt to satisfy both sides. That is far less restrictive than a House-passed provision that left liberal Democrats angry.
Ahead lie weeks - if not more - of unpredictable maneuvering on the Senate floor, where Reid and his allies will seek to incorporate changes sought by Democrats and repel attempts by Republicans to defeat the legislation and inflict a significant political defeat on the president.
Reid released his legislation more than a week after the House approved its version of the health care bill on a near party-line vote of 220-215.
According to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, that House bill, with a price tag of about $1.2 trillion, would result in coverage for tens of millions of uninsured, and provide 96 percent of the eligible population with insurance.
Two Senate committees approved different versions earlier in the year, and while Reid has said he would produce a blend of the two proposals, in fact he had a virtual free hand to come up with a plan that could command the 60 votes needed to pass.
Anticipating a major struggle, the White House deputized Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to join Vice President Joe Biden in trying to clear the way for the bill's approval over the next several weeks.
Salazar, a former Colorado senator, is viewed as a bridge to moderate Democrats who are far outnumbered by liberals inside the Democratic caucus.
Daschle was Obama's first choice for secretary of health and human services, a position from which he was to try and oversee the administration's drive to enact health care legislation. He withdrew his nomination when it was disclosed he had not paid more than $120,000 in federal taxes over several years.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Erica Werner contributed to this report.
? 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

DASCHLE IS STILL GO-TO GUY ON HEALTHCARE (HILL)
By Alexander Bolton
The Hill, November 19, 2009
Tom Daschle on Wednesday huddled with Vice President Biden and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to strategize on healthcare reform, nearly 10 months after his Cabinet nomination crashed and burned.
Reid (D-Nev.) invited Daschle to his office for a meeting with Biden as Democrats are scrambling to secure 60 votes to clear a procedural motion on healthcare reform.
Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who has strong friendships with Democratic centrists such as Sen. Mary Landrieu (La.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.), also attended the meeting.
The former Senate majority leader from South Dakota is unexpectedly at the heart of Washington's highest-level negotiations at a key moment in the movement to reform the nation's healthcare system.
When Daschle withdrew his name from consideration for secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services in February, it appeared that he would fade into the background. The withdrawal came after days of national headlines focusing on the ex-senator's unpaid taxes. Daschle at the time acknowledged he had become a "distraction."
Obama said he "screwed up" in handling Daschle's nomination: "Ultimately, I campaigned on changing Washington and bottom-up politics."
The president added, "And I don't want to send a message to the American people that there are two sets of standards -- one for powerful people and one for ordinary folks who are working every day and paying their taxes."
Daschle announced this week he will be leaving one lobbying firm, Alston & Bird, for another, DLA Piper. The ex-senator has repeatedly stressed he did not lobby for Alston & Bird and will not lobby for DLA Piper, but government watchdogs have noted both firms have many healthcare clients. Daschle's title at DLA Piper will be "senior policy adviser."
Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), who negotiated healthcare legislation with Reid over the last several weeks, told The Hill Wednesday that Daschle has been in frequent contact with members of the upper chamber.
Daschle declined through an assistant a request for an interview.
Daschle is the second major hire with Senate ties DLA Piper has made in recent months. The firm also picked up former Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.) in September.
Francis Burch, the global chairman of DLA Piper, is clearly pleased to have landed Daschle, who is admired by his former colleagues on Capitol Hill.
"Sen. Daschle is a senior statesman and is justifiably regarded as one of the wisest and most effective problem solvers in Washington as well as in the nation and the world," said Burch.

REID ROLLING OUT BIG GUNS TO PUSH HEALTHCARE BILL TO 60 NEEDED VOTES (HILL)
By Alexander Bolton
The Hill, November 19, 2009
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has recruited an all-star team of former senators - Vice President Joe Biden, Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar - to push healthcare reform over the finish line.
Reid (D-Nev.) plotted strategy with the vice president, Interior Secretary Salazar and former Majority Leader Daschle (D-S.D.) on Wednesday, days ahead of a crucial vote to begin debate on the bill that needs every Democrat.
Reid's all-star team indicates that the administration and Democratic leadership are now using all the persuading power and arm-twisting prowess available to them to carry President Barack Obama's signature agenda item to a successful conclusion.
A handful of Democratic centrists are holding out on the procedural vote, wanting time to read the legislation.
Reid got good news Wednesday when the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reported the measure would spend $849 billion over 10 years to cover 31 million of the uninsured and reduce the federal budget deficit by $127 billion over that time. That's under Obama's spending limit of $900 billion, a concern of many in the middle
Democratic leaders shared the legislation with the conference on Wednesday and then planned to

hold a news conference and make the bill public.
"There's not a lot of room for error here," said Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), among those centrists targeted. "I think the administration is pulling out all the stops.
A Democratic aide said Biden met with Reid Wednesday morning to offer use of his extensive legislative experience and many friendships in the senate.
"He showed up to say, 'What can I do to help?' " said the aide.
Biden declined to say which senators he chatted with Wednesday.
"I met with a lot of people, anybody who will talk to me," Biden said while leaving the Capitol Wednesday afternoon, almost five hours after he arrived.
Biden served 36 years in the Senate and has strong relationships with nearly the entire Democratic Conference.
Salazar, a Democratic senator from Colorado until he joined the administration this year, has close friendships with Landrieu and Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.).
Daschle, a three-term senator, has also served as a colleague with those centrists who are considered the least likely to vote for a healthcare reform bill that includes a government-run insurance program. That group includes Landrieu, Nelson, Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (Conn.), an Independent who caucuses with the Democrats
"Relationships mean a lot around here and Sen. Biden has them and Sen. Daschle has them and Salazar has them," said Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), a member of the Senate Finance Committee who helped craft that panel's healthcare bill.
Landrieu suspected Obama may have even asked the three to make the final sales pitch to those on the fence
"They know the senators well, they know the Senate well, they know our rules and the way this is going to have to be negotiated on the floor," said Landrieu, who was scheduled to meet with Salazar on Wednesday.
Landrieu, Nelson and Lincoln met with Reid Wednesday afternoon to discuss their concerns with the legislation.
Landrieu said she was inclined to vote against the motion to begin debate on the legislation but the meeting with Reid mollified some of her concerns.
"I'm in neutral right now," she said. "The meeting helped."
Nelson said his relationship with Biden has always been "very solid" and called Salazar "one of my very best friends in the Senate."
Salazar told The Hill: "I will help as needed" on healthcare reform.
"If needed, I'm available," said Salazar, adding he also spoke to lawmakers Wednesday about energy and climate change.
Lawmakers said that Biden has been active in healthcare negotiations over the past several weeks but they have not noticed much of a role for Salazar and Daschle. They expect all three ex-senators to become frequent visitors - in person and on the phone - in the coming weeks.
"Biden has already [played] a very constructive role as far as I'm concerned, reaching out to people, talking to people, he's come to my office and having me down there," Conrad added.
Conrad, however, said he was not aware of Daschle or Salazar playing as active a role to date.
Biden and Daschle may be needed to convince liberals to agree to concessions made to centrists.
Republicans are united against the Democratic healthcare bill. Sen. Olympia Snowe (Maine), the only Senate Republican to support the Finance Committee bill, has indicated she will not back the motion to proceed. That means Reid needs every member of his conference to get the 60 votes to begin debate.
Nelson issued a statement Wednesday that a few Senate insiders interpreted as laying the groundwork for a yes vote.
Nelson defended his right to vote for the motion to begin debate, arguing that it did not equate to a vote for the healthcare reform bill.
"Let me say it again: It is a motion to start debate on a bill and to try to improve it," he said.
A senior Democratic aide said Reid will likely need two votes to overcome the Republican filibuster. One scenario would have a Saturday vote to end debate on the motion to proceed and then a Sunday vote on the motion to begin debate.
Jeffrey Young contributed to this article.

SENATE DEMS TAKE $849B STEP TOWARD HEALTHCARE REFORM (HILL)
By Jeffrey Young
The Hill, November 19, 2009
Senate Democrats made a significant stride toward achieving President Barack Obama's goal of enacting a sweeping overhaul of the healthcare system with a bill that would spend $849 billion over 10 years to reduce the number of uninsured by 31 million people.
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) introduced the bill Wednesday even as he continued to scramble to win over a handful of centrist Democrats who remain uncommitted. But Reid and other Democratic senators declared they had reached a pivotal moment in the debate.
"We've traveled really a long ways to where we are. Tonight begins the last leg of this journey we've been on now for some time," Reid said.
With the House having passed its version of healthcare reform earlier this month, Obama is closer than any president has ever been to signing into law a major healthcare reform bill.
"Today we passed another critical milestone in the health reform effort," Obama said in a statement.
Democrats invoked the memory of the late Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who called healthcare reform the cause of his life. "I intend to ensure that we do everything we can to fulfill Ted Kennedy's dream," said Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa).
But it will take more than inspiration to achieve success on an issue that has stymied presidents since Teddy Roosevelt.
The healthcare bill, and Reid's leadership of the effort, will face its biggest test yet Saturday, when the Senate will convene for a rare weekend session to hold a procedural motion on the legislation that stands as the first hurdle to advancing healthcare reform.
Even as Reid addressed the entire Senate Democratic caucus Wednesday evening and boasted about his bill, he could not say he had locked down the 60 votes he needs to ensure success on Saturday.
Centrist Democratic Sens. Mary Landrieu (La.), Blanche Lincoln (Ark.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.) continued to withhold promises to vote with Reid even after the trio sat down with the leader in his Capitol office. Reid received an assist Wednesday from Vice President Biden, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, a former senator from Colorado, and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), the man who would have been Obama's top healthcare adviser if he had not stepped aside amid controversy over unpaid taxes.
In a statement, Nelson hinted he might vote to advance the bill even if he did not support all of it but stopped short of declaring a position. "In reality, the meaning of the motion to proceed is very simple: It's a motion to commence debate and an opportunity to make changes," he said.
Over the course of more than a month, Reid worked through the challenge of melding separate healthcare reform bills passed by the HELP and Finance committees.
It was more than simply a legislative task. Though the two committee's bills, like the measure passed this month by the House, employ the same basic structure, they emerged from vastly different political contexts. The HELP Committee bill was considerably more liberal in its aims and more expensive in its costs compared to the Finance Committee.
Moreover, Reid had to settle vexing political questions that still threaten to divide his party. To the chagrin of some centrist Democrats, the bill includes a form of the public option prized by liberals and trouble still brewing on explosive issues such as abortion and immigration.
Republicans remain solidly opposed to the Democrats' bill, despite the majority's hope they may eventually win the support of Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine).
"While Americans have been clear about their opposition to thousand-page bills for new government programs, it's now abundantly clear that Democrats haven't been listening," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said. "This is yet another trillion-dollar experiment, but it is not what Americans bargained for."
The bill would bring the rate of legal U.S. residents younger than 65 with insurance to 94 percent by covering 31 million more people via health insurance exchange featuring private coverage and a new government-run public option plan and expanding Medicaid for the poor at a cost of $849 billion.
The health insurance exchanges in the states would take effect in 2014 and states would be

permitted to opt out of the public option by passing a law to refuse it. People below 133 percent of the federal poverty level would be eligible for Medicaid. Those between 133 percent and 300 percent of poverty would receive subsidies and people between 133 percent and 400 percent of poverty would enjoy annual caps on premiums and out-of-pocket expenses as a percentage of income.
The bill also includes extensive new insurance regulations, including those that would limit companies' ability to deny coverage or care, cancel policies for the sick, vary premiums on age, health status, gender and other factors.
Individuals would be required to obtain coverage or face a penalty. Employers with more than 50 workers would have pay a fee if they do not offer affordable coverage and their employees receive federal subsidies to purchase insurance on the exchange.
In addition, the legislation would reduce to federal budget deficit by $127 billion over 10 years, according to Congressional Budget Office (CBO) figures touted by Democrats. Moreover, in the second 20 years after the bill would take effect, deficit-reduction could reach a staggering $650 billion.
To pay for their bill and achieve deficit reduction, Democrats cut Medicare spending on payments to medical providers by more than $400 billion, in part by establish new payments systems designed to promote efficiency.
The bill also would raise $371.9 billion in new taxes over 10 years, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation.
The bulk of those new revenues -- $149.1 billion -- would come from a 40 percent excise tax on the value of health insurance plans above $8,500 for individuals and $23,000 for families. Reid scaled back this tax to allay concerns about Democrats and labor unions that it would ensare too many middle-class people.
Reid added a new proposal to the bill that would increase the Medicare payroll tax for high-income earners by 0.5 percent to 1.95 percent of adjusted gross income. This new tax would raise $54 billion and affect individuals making more than $200,000 or families earning more than $250,000.
Pharmaceutical, health insurance and medical device companies would be tapped for a combined $101.9 billion in taxes. The medical device fee was more than halved from an earlier proposal to $19.3 billion to respond to complaints from Democratic Sens. John Kerry (Mass.), Evan Bayh (Ind.) and others.
In addition, the bill includes a plethora of provisions designed to improve the quality and delivery of healthcare services by means such as promoting the use of preventive medicine.

LANDRIEU REAX (POL)
By Live Pulse
Politico, November 19, 2009
Swing vote Sen. Mary Landrieu said she she'll decide tomorrow if she will vote to move the bill forward, after she's had a chance to read the bill. But the cost estimates being bandied about "sounds like numbers I was expecting to hear," she said.
"They're going to pull out all the stops and they're going to do everything they can to work as closely with us and again, Democrats, we're trying to stay as united as we can be. We know this is an important issue for the country and it's important we get it right. And we're moving in the right direction, for the most part. At least we're getting bills that are less than a trillion dollars, that are paid for, that are lowering the cost to the taxpayer and to businesses, so we're moving in the right direction but there's still some improvements that could be made and I'm hoping to see that on the floor."
By Jake Sherman and Patrick O'Connor
Read the rest of Landrieu's interview as captured by Sherman, the fastest transcriber this side of the Mississippi, after the jump.
Enormous cooperation to get a bill through this process. The Democrats have to try to remain united and reach out to republicans like Senator Snowe, potentially others, maybe Senator Collins as we go forward. But as you know I've been concerned about three basic things from the very beginning. One to make sure that this bill's main focus is driving down costs to small business, to families, to individuals and the government. Not just driving down costs for the government, but driving down costs for small businesses that are the key job creators that'll move us out of the

recession we're in. If we can't give some relief to small business, then in my view it's almost not worth doing a bill. You know, if we cant provide a better path forward for businesses out there to be able to provide the kind of insurance at more reasonable costs, more choice more reasonable cost, it's almost worth not doing.
And then if we can't reduce the cost to the government, it's most certainly not worth doing because it's already 16 percent of our GDP. That's why until I see the CBO score and until I can review the bill, I'm just staying neutral.
And then the third piece is I understand proponents of a public option think it's a must have to keep the insurance industry honest. I want to reform the insurance industry, I do not want to eliminate them. And if we are not careful on this public option piece, you could eliminate private insurance. And that's not what we want to do. We want to reform it, we want to make sure we get rid of pre-existing conditions, if you get insurance you should keep it, we don't want to eliminate it and drive people into a government run, taxpayer subsidized public option. So those are the three things that I'm focused on. And if those issues are settled through the debate, then I'll be able to be supportive of a bill.
WHAT SHE TALKED ABOUT WITH INTERIOR SECRETARY KEN SALAZAR: We talked about the cap and trade, we talked about other options to get a carbon pricing outside the cap and trade method. We talked about off-shore oil and gas drilling, expanding domestic production, it was mostly an energy debate but we did also talk about health care. And as I said, I'm glad that the administration has asked Secretary Salazar and I think Vice President Biden to get more engaged. They are two members of the administration that obviously know a lot about the senate, they know all the senators, they know how the senate operates and they know we have, I mean sort of limited maneuvering room over here. We've gotta have all 60 of us and its hard to get 60 people to agree on some of these major issues. But we're making progress. But again, I'm neutral, I haven't made a final decision. I'm going to review the bill, look at the CBO score which we should be getting anytime now. And then decide to go forward. But again, if I do, if, to move for the debate, those are the three things I'll be generally looking for. And if they don't materialize I will not be supportive at the end.
ON INITIAL REPORTS OF CBO SCORE: That sounds like numbers I was expecting to hear. They're going to pull out all the stops and they're going to do everything they can to work as closely with us and again, democrats, we're trying to stay as united as we can be. We know this is an important issue for the country and it's important we get it right. And we're moving in the right direction, for the most part. At least we're getting bills that are less than a trillion dollars, that are paid for, that are lowering the cost to the taxpayer and to businesses, so we're moving in the right direction but there's still some improvements that could be made and I'm hoping to see that on the floor.

AS 2010 LOOMS, GOP LAYS ITS BETS ON OPPOSING HEALTH-CARE REFORM (WP)
By Dan Balz
Washington Post, November 19, 2009
"All the anxiety's on the other side," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said with a smile earlier this week, as the Senate prepared for a historic floor debate over health care. "The hand-wringing, the agonizing, the how-do-I-explain this-to-my-constituents is on the other side."
On the day he spoke, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and White House officials were still putting out fires in their effort to round up the 60 votes necessary to clear the procedural hurdle allowing the Senate to go ahead with the debate. Reid would say only that he was "cautiously optimistic" that he would have the votes when he needed them.
McConnell went out of his way to draw a contrast with the other side. "I've got a cheerful, upbeat, optimistic team ready to go to battle over what most of my members, if not all of them, believe may well be the most important issue they will ever deal with in their time in Congress -- this effort to transform the American health care system into a European type system," he said. "So we are anxious for the debate and are going to give it our best shot. And I don't know how it's going to turn out."
President Obama and Democratic congressional leaders ultimately may prevail in their year-long effort to overhaul the nation's health care system. They have the numbers, if they can keep everyone on board once the bills have been amended on the floor and changed again in a

conference committee. Still, McConnell and the Republicans now are betting that, no matter the outcome, their outright opposition to the plan advanced by the Democrats is both right on the merits and, as they look ahead to 2010, smart politics as well.
Republicans see two things that give them cause to believe their opposition will be rewarded, even if Obama eventually signs health care legislation later this year or early in 2010. The Republican base is overwhelming opposed to the measure being advanced by the Democrats. And there has been a bleeding off of support among independents for Obama's policies, particularly health care. The latest Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 85 percent of Republicans oppose the health-care measure -- 73 percent of them strongly. That kind of energy produced the protests during the August recess, the Tea Party demonstrations this fall and the united front that Republican congressional leaders have adopted almost from the beginning of this debate.
Republicans also believe they are winning the battle for independents on health care. The Post-ABC News poll showed that only 45 percent support health care reform while 52 percent oppose it. Almost twice as many independents strongly oppose the measure as strongly support it. To Republican leaders, those numbers speak to potential anti-Democratic Party energy they hope to tap next year, even if the bill is enacted into law.
What White House and Democratic congressional leaders fear most now is a failure to reach the finish line. Failure to pass the bill would represent a huge disappointment to many of those who voted for Obama last year.
In the Post-ABC poll, 75 percent of Democrats support health care legislation, with 52 percent saying they strongly back the administration's efforts. A legislative defeat could significantly demoralize the Democratic base and lead to depressed turnout in next year's midterm elections. Which is a major reason why White House officials have preached that failure is not an option this time around.
White House officials read public opinion differently than do Republicans. They believe that Republicans in competitive races next year could pay a high price for opposing health care. They have seized on a new poll in Delaware that shows attorney general Beau Biden (the son of Vice President Biden) moving up dramatically against popular Republican Rep. Mike Castle, who has announced for the Senate and who voted against the health care in the House.
McConnell argued that Democrats have made a fateful decision to try to rally support with the argument that failure is not an option. "It's almost laughable," he said. "That's all they're left with. President Clinton was up here arguing that with the Senate Democrats about a week ago. And the reasoning was there's no other argument they can make. They've got no poll data they can show them. And so how do they get them to take a bullet for the team? They make this incredulous argument that somehow they'd have been better off if they'd passed it in the fall of '94. I don't think anybody buys that."
Democrats scoff at that assertion, believing McConnell is being disingenuous. If Republicans believe Democrats would be better off politically if the health care bill fails, they ask, why have members of the GOP worked so hard to defeat it?
White House officials believe that, if a bill passes, the political fever surrounding the legislative debate will break. Their hope is that most Americans (especially those independents who are skeptical about the bill) will find the sky hasn't fallen and, beyond that, will come to appreciate some of the insurance reforms that would prevent companies from dropping people or denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions.
McConnell notes that Obama won't face the voters until 2012. But Democrats in Congress have to worry about next year. That puts their political interests potentially at odds with those of the president. Will those Democrats in swing districts or red states ultimately buy White House arguments that a "yes" vote will be the right vote back home?
McConnell is not prepared to predict the future. But he said he believes that, "in every measurable way," Republicans are better off today than they were a year ago, with candidates "coming out of our ears" who think the climate is right. He won't say so but he also seems to believe Republicans are poised for a very good year in 2010.
The Democrats have much at stake in the health care debate. But so too do the Republicans.

ABC: STIMULUS WEBSITE. ABC World News (11/18, story 5, 2:55, Gibson) reported, "The Government Accountability Office today both praised and criticized the Obama Administration's

website, set up to track the number of jobs created or saved by the economic stimulus. The GAO says it's a step toward accountability. But the head of the agency that oversees the stimulus program has written Congress that they can't guarantee any of the jobs have actually been created. Jonathan Karl continues on this story tonight. Jon." ABC (Karl) added, "Charlie, the government's top watchdog says that the White House has made a solid first step towards transparency in stimulus spending but that those numbers of jobs saved and created have significant problems. More than 58,000 of the jobs the White House claims were created or retained by the stimulus come from projects where no money has been spent. Nearly 1 out of every 10 jobs claimed on the Administration's Recovery.gov website. That's according to a report by the Government Accountability Office. Republicans say the numbers don't add up." Rep. Darrell Issa, (R) Ranking Member, Oversight and Government Reform Committee: "The inaccuracy of the site also shows you just how inept the government is at getting the facts right and making them available to the public." Karl: "The White House says the problems are minimal and fixable." Ed DeSeve, senior adviser, Recovery Act Implementation: "I think the problems that we see out of 12 million data elements are probably less than 1%. They are errors that recipients made, by in large, in reporting that either they didn't have time to correct or didn't identify in time." Karl: "But the chairman of the board that oversees the stimulus tells Congress in a letter obtained by ABC News, that he 'can't certify any of the jobs data' now on the website, because the information has all been reported by the grant recipients themselves and not independently verified. A lot of the errors are simply sloppy mistakes. In Virginia, Kevin Knight's company reported his roughly $700,000 stimulus project created ten jobs in the 36th congressional district. That district doesn't exist, but his project does, and so do the jobs. He blames the mistake on a computer glitch." Kevin Knight, president of Knight Solutions: "It actually appeared on the website where I was. It kind of popped up based on the address and zip code." Karl: "On 'The Daily Show' with Jon Stewart, Vice President Biden said the mistakes on Recovery.gov don't add up to much and that there's been no wasteful spending." Joe Biden, Vice President of the United States: "We've been in business seven, eight months. But one thing you haven't seen is that old thing about the dog that hadn't barked. You haven't seen these big wasteful - no one's come up with anything we would have gone out there and spent $2 million on something that didn't exist." Karl: "The Vice President's spokesperson today told us that the stimulus is, quote, 'the most transparent and accountable government program in American history.' But that, Charlie, is not stopping the criticism here on Capitol Hill and demands for greater accuracy. As for those reports of fictional congressional districts, we are told that most of those were corrected today." Gibson: 'Jonathan Karl on Capitol Hill, thank you."

NUMBER OF STIMULUS JOBS CREATED CALLED INTO QUESTION (WSJ)
By Louise Radnofsky
Wall Street Journal, November 19, 2009
The Government Accountability Office, the congressional watchdog, will testify at a House oversight committee hearing Thursday that there are "significant issues to be addressed" in the accuracy of reports about the number of jobs credited to the federal stimulus program because of errors in forms filed by recipients of the money.
Separately, the agency tasked with overseeing the program announced Wednesday evening that it had corrected reports by recipients who appeared to be in non-existent congressional districts, after being asked to do so by the White House.
Discrepancies in the administration's count of jobs "created or saved" by the $787 billion stimulus program are causing headaches among Congressional Democrats who are trying to craft a new jobs program in the face of the highest unemployment rate in 26 years. Rep. David Obey (D., Wis.), who as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee will have a major role in any new jobs package, released a statement earlier this week calling inaccuracies in the stimulus recipient reports "outrageous."
The reports were used by the administration to claim that the plan had directly created or saved 640,329 jobs through September. But questions have been raised about the accuracy of the job counts and other details listed on the forms since their release by the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board on its website, recovery.gov, last month.
"Many entries merit further attention," acting comptroller general Gene Dodaro is expected to say,

according to a draft of his testimony received by the Wall Street Journal.
Republicans are seizing on reports of inaccuracies to question the impact and accountability of the stimulus package.
Earl Devaney, chairman of the recovery board, will also be at the House oversight committee hearing. Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.), the ranking Republican on the panel, has called for recovery.gov to carry a disclaimer "warning visitors to the Web site that the information is not accurate and auditable."
Federal agencies were responsible for reviewing each report filed by a recipient of funds they were administering, and asking recipients to fix mistakes. The recovery board and White House officials also carried out spot checks. Still, many errors appear to have gone undetected in the 156,614 reports released last month.
Recipients of stimulus money ranging from small business contractors and community colleges to large companies and state governor's offices struggled to accurately fill in the forms. The Wall Street Journal reported two weeks ago that errors by hundreds of recipients appeared to have inflated the total number of jobs attributed to the stimulus by at least 20,000.
Some recipients also failed to correctly enter the number of their congressional district, which has led to a flurry of accusations this week from Republicans that non-existent places were claiming to have created or saved jobs. The National Republican Congressional Committee is encouraging its candidates to send out press releases highlighting the mistakes, with statements that they should undermine confidence in the government's ability to handle healthcare.
Vice President Joe Biden, appearing on the comedy news program "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" Tuesday, played down the congressional district errors, joking about "bad civics classes." "The jobs actually exist," he said.
On Wednesday evening the recovery board said that it had corrected the mistakes, explaining that it is allowed to do so when there is a " significant risk that the public will be misled or confused.
Mr. Biden's assistant for implementing the stimulus plan, Ed DeSeve, told the Wall Street Journal Wednesday that the White House was still confident that it could use the reports to correctly assess "the order of magnitude of the jobs numbers that are out there." "We think it is sufficiently accurate that it provides a good snapshot of where we are," said Mr. DeSeve.
The reports come at a tough time for House leaders, who have been floating a new spending program this week, and the White House, which has announced a jobs summit for early December in the wake of a new unemployment figure of 10.2%.
Public confidence in the existing stimulus plan also remains shaky. Only 7% of respondents in a CBS News poll released Tuesday thought that the stimulus package had created jobs. Some 46% thought it would create jobs in future, but that percentage was down from 52% in September.
Write to Louise Radnofsky at louise.radnofsky@dowjones.com

GAO CALLS FOR CLEARER GUIDANCE FROM ADMINISTRATION FOR REPORTING USE OF STIMULUS FUNDS (WP)
By Ed O'Keefe, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post, November 19, 2009
A government audit set for release Thursday urges the Obama administration to provide further guidance on how recipients of economic stimulus dollars should report jobs created with the funding.
The administration has struggled to clearly define how to report new or saved jobs since it's difficult to know what role the funding played. Further complicating efforts, state and local governments have used much of the money to pay for temporary, part-time or seasonal work, making it unclear when and how such jobs should be reported.
The Government Accountability Office found that almost 4,000 designated recipients who have not yet received stimulus funding reported creating or saving more than 58,000 jobs. Another 9,200 recipients reported no job creation, despite receiving a total of $965 million. The findings demonstrate the difficulty of counting jobs created by the stimulus.
Some recipients may have misstated job numbers. Others may have decided to retain workers or hire new ones, knowing that they will receive stimulus funding in the near future. Other recipients that already spent money are reporting zero jobs created or saved because they are applying a narrow definition for what counts as a "saved" job or because they may not be taking into account

the jobs created by a subcontractor receiving funds from the recipient.
Auditors will present their findings at a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing at which members of both parties are expected to grill administration officials about errors submitted by recipients in their quarterly reports. Government officials on Wednesday corrected or removed several incorrect Zip codes or congressional districts from the reports posted on Recovery.gov, the government's stimulus-tracking Web site.
The GAO audit also found that the government has failed to review about 25 percent of the quarterly reports submitted by stimulus recipients. Vice President Biden said earlier this week that the administration has yet to review every report. "The jobs actually exist," despite concerns about the validity of stimulus data, Biden said Tuesday on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."
Biden noted that there have been no reports of widespread misuse of stimulus funding, but the GAO is pursuing at least eight allegations of waste or abuse of stimulus funds from more than 100 reported. The audit agency has referred at least 33 other allegations to federal inspectors general, according to the report.

JOB-COUNTING HELP IS NEEDED (WP)
GAO calls for clearer guidance for reporting use of stimulus funds
By Ed O'Keefe, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post, November 19, 2009
A government audit set for release Thursday urges the Obama administration to provide further guidance on how recipients of economic stimulus dollars should report jobs created with the funding.
The administration has struggled to clearly define how to report new or saved jobs since it's difficult to know what role the funding played. Further complicating efforts, state and local governments have used much of the money to pay for temporary, part-time or seasonal work, making it unclear when and how such jobs should be reported.
The Government Accountability Office found that almost 4,000 designated recipients who have not yet received stimulus funding reported creating or saving more than 58,000 jobs. Another 9,200 recipients reported no job creation, despite receiving a total of $965 million. The findings demonstrate the difficulty of counting jobs created by the stimulus.
Some recipients may have misstated job numbers. Others may have decided to retain workers or hire new ones, knowing that they will receive stimulus funding in the near future. Other recipients that already spent money are reporting zero jobs created or saved because they are applying a narrow definition for what counts as a "saved" job or because they may not be taking into account the jobs created by a subcontractor receiving funds from the recipient.
Auditors will present their findings at a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing at which members of both parties are expected to grill administration officials about errors submitted by recipients in their quarterly reports. Government officials on Wednesday corrected or removed several incorrect Zip codes or congressional districts from the reports posted on Recovery.gov, the government's stimulus-tracking Web site.
The GAO audit also found that the government has failed to review about 25 percent of the quarterly reports submitted by stimulus recipients. Vice President Biden said earlier this week that the administration has yet to review every report. "The jobs actually exist," despite concerns about the validity of stimulus data, Biden said Tuesday on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."
Biden noted that there have been no reports of widespread misuse of stimulus funding, but the GAO is pursuing at least eight allegations of waste or abuse of stimulus funds from more than 100 reported. The audit agency has referred at least 33 other allegations to federal inspectors general, according to the report.

BIDEN: JOBS WILL LAG BY 12 TO 18 MONTHS (NPR)
By Mark Memmott
NPR, November 19, 2009
For anyone who's out of work, "nothing matters until you have a job," Vice President Joe Biden conceded on last night's The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. And, unfortunately, "jobs are going to lag behind growth in this country by somewhere between 12 to 18 months," Biden added.

BIDEN SAYS ERRORS ON RECOVERY.GOV WILL BE FIXED (CNN)
By Alexander Mooney
CNN, November 19, 2009
Vice President Joe Biden is downplaying news the government Web site Recovery.gov reported hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars spent on projects in congressional districts that in fact do not actually exist.
(CNN) - Vice President Joe Biden is downplaying news the government Web site Recovery.gov reported hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars spent on projects in congressional districts that in fact do not actually exist.
The districts don't exist, but the projects do, Biden said Tuesday night.
And the administration isn't to blame - the fault lies with the nation's educational system.
In an appearance on The Daily Show, Biden said the errors - first reported by ABC News - do not indicate unaccounted-for spending but are rather the result of 70 people who are the product of "bad civics classes."
"Every single solitary penny that got sent out there to a state, a construction company, a nonprofit had to be accounted for," Biden told host Jon Stewart. "And it all got put on Recovery.gov. What happened was, out of 130,000 people reporting in what they did with the money.70 did not know how to count."
"There was bad civics classes for those 70 people," Biden continued. "They had to fill out a form, what district are you in, and there was no such district."
Biden said checkers are now going through the reports to determine the actual districts where the money was spent.

FEDS: FALSE CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS REMOVED FROM STIMULUS SITE (CNN)
CNN, November 19, 2009
(CNN) -- The government Web site Recovery.gov is fixing errors that appeared to show hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars were spent in nonexistent congressional districts, the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board said Wednesday.
The errors, first reported by ABC News, were seen on Recovery.gov summary pages breaking down how many stimulus dollars were received in each state's congressional districts.
Arizona's page, for example, showed the state's 52nd, 15th and 86th congressional districts received hundreds of thousands of dollars in stimulus money, according to CNN affiliate KNXV. However, no such districts exist in Arizona, which has only eight congressional districts.
A report released Wednesday by the Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity said it found such errors on pages for all 50 states, four territories and Washington, D.C. More than $6.4 billion in stimulus funds was shown as being spent -- and more than 28,420 jobs saved or created -- in 440 false districts, it said.
The districts didn't exist, but the the money and jobs did, Obama administration officials have said.
And the people who are to blame are recipients who apparently didn't know which congressional district they were in, the officials said.
"We report what the recipients submit to us. Some recipients clearly don't know what congressional district they live in, so they just throw in a number for their congressional district," Ed Pound, spokesman for the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, which operates Recovery.gov, said Monday.
In an appearance on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" on Tuesday night, Vice President Joe Biden said the errors didn't indicate unaccounted-for spending but rather were the result of people who had "bad civics classes."
"There was bad civics classes for those" who reported the data, Biden said. "They had to fill out a form, what district are you in, and there was no such district."
By Wednesday evening, incorrect districts appeared to have been removed from the states' summary pages. Arizona's page, for example, listed only the state's eight real districts and a category called "unassigned congressional district," which appeared to contain all the money that had been attached to the nonexistent congressional districts.
Arizona's "unassigned congressional district" row had $39,577,600, which is roughly the total that the Franklin Center said was previously linked to nonexistent districts.
Money that was reported as having been spent in a nonexistent district would be moved, in

databases on the site, to the correct one in cases where the recipient reported a ZIP code, the RATB said Wednesday evening. Recipients who didn't submit a ZIP code will need to make corrections "during the next reporting period, which begins on January 1, 2010," the board said in a news release.
The errors raised the ire of U.S. Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wisconsin, and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. On Monday, he said the mistakes "are outrageous and the administration owes itself, the Congress and every American a commitment to work night and day to correct the ludicrous mistakes."
"Credibility counts in government, and stupid mistakes like this undermine it. We've got too many serious problems in this country to let that happen," Obey said.
CNN's Alexander Mooney, Kate Bolduan and Jason Hanna contributed to this story.

OOPS. FEDS ADD 45 CONGRESSMEN (OMAHA)
By Tom Shaw
Omaha World-Herald, November 19, 2009
If you believe the federal government's stimulus report, Nebraska's population has jumped quite a bit.
According to the report, the state has 48 congressional districts. Actually, Nebraska only has three.
Several non-existent congressional districts also were included in the report for Iowa.
The errors are another example of the problems that have plagued the stimulus reports available on the federal Web site recovery.gov.
This week, Vice President Joe Biden ordered officials to fix errors in the reports.
The report for Nebraska lists several congressional districts that don't exist, such as 4, 14, 31, 44 and 48.
In some cases, the number listed likely refers to a state legislative district where the money was awarded. For example, the report lists $47,897 being awarded to the 43rd Congressional District. However, the money is for housing assistance in Ainsworth, which is in the 43rd Legislative District.
In eight cases, the wrong district is listed because information for projects from other states was incorrectly included in the stimulus report for Nebraska. Projects for Minnesota, North Carolina, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri and California are in the Nebraska report.
For example, $102,375 that went to the University of California-Santa Barbara ended up being listed in the stimulus report for Nebraska.
Of course, Nebraska may wish it had a 17th Congressional District. According to the report, 22.4 jobs were created or saved there.

WHERE DID THAT STIMULUS MONEY GO? (MINNST)
By Bob Von Sternberg, Star Tribune
Minneapolis Star Tribune, November 19, 2009
Minnesota's 27th Congressional District has snared just over $3 million in federal stimulus money, five times as much as the 57th District has gotten.
One problem: Neither district exists -- except on Recovery.gov, the Obama administration's website that tracks the flow of stimulus cash.
Beyond Minnesota's eight actual congressional districts, which have gotten the lion's share of the money, the website lists 11 phantom districts that supposedly were awarded more than $7 million in grants.
An official at the stimulus' oversight body told ABC News, which first reported the errors, that nonexistent districts were listed because some people receiving federal funds "don't know what congressional district they live in, so they appear to be just throwing in any number" on forms submitted to the government.
Gov. Tim Pawlenty took aim at the errors Tuesday, tweeting: "Fed spending out of control -- it appears to go places that don't exist. MN has 8 cong districts; Recovery.gov says we have a 57th."
The errors weren't just in Minnesota. According to ABC, administration officials say they found 700 mistakenly credited phantom districts for amounts that totaled $6.4 billion, while supposedly creating or saving nearly 30,000 jobs.
Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wis., chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, wrote the $787 billion

economic stimulus bill that Congress passed in February. He has been one of the recovery effort's most ardent supporters, but earlier this week blasted the errors.
"Credibility counts in government, and stupid mistakes like this undermine it," Obey said in a statement. "The inaccuracies on Recovery.gov that have come to light are outrageous, and the administration owes itself, the Congress and every American a commitment to work night and day to correct the ludicrous mistakes."
When Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., questioned administration officials about the mistakes, Earl Devaney, chairman of the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, replied in a letter that he can't completely vouch for the numbers.
"Your letter specifically asks if I am able to certify that the number of jobs reported as created/saved on Recovery.gov is accurate and auditable. No, I am not able to make this certification," Devaney wrote, in a letter provided to ABC News.
Appearing on "The Daily Show" Tuesday, Vice President Joe Biden offered this defense: "Look, the bottom line is that we do check [data sent to the federal government]. But what happens is the initial report comes in cold. We don't -- of the 130,000 reports that come in, as to what they did with the money, we're now going through it."
Staff writer Eric Roper and the Washington Post contributed to this report. Bob Von Sternberg . 612-673-7184

FACT-CHECKING BIDEN'S STIMULUS FACT-CHECK (ABC NEWS)
ABC News Blogs, November 19, 2009
ABC News' Jonathan Karl reports: Last night on "The Daily Show," Vice President Joe Biden addressed the reports of stimulus jobs in non-existent Congressional districts -- but in the process, he made a mistake himself.
"Out of 140,000 people reporting in what they did with the money -- who they hired, how many jobs -- 70 didn't know how to count," Biden told Jon Stewart. "There were bad civics classes for 70 people and they put in districts -- what district are you in? No such district.
But later, Biden spokesman Jay Carney told ABC News that the vice President misspoke. In fact, 700 reports were listed with fictional congressional districts.
Carney said Administration has made an unprecedented amount information public about the stimulus program.
"Never before in history has a federal government program been this transparent and accountable. Never. Not even close."
Even so, 700 represents only about one-half of 1 percent of the stimulus projects listed. The overwhelming majority of the stimulus projects, the vice president's office points out, were listed with the correct congressional district. Meanwhile, the 700 mistakes are being corrected
Biden said that, in contrast with the Bush administration, there has been no wasteful spending under President Obama.
"We've been in business seven, eight months," Biden said. "You haven't seen wasteful spending. No one has said we spent $2 million on things that didn't exist."

NO GAFFES, FEW LAUGHS FOR BIDEN'S SITDOWN WITH STEWART (NBC DFW)
By Greg Wilson
NBC Dallas-Fort Worth, November 19, 2009
The only gaffe came on the way to his appearance on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," and even his harshest critics couldn't blame that one on Vice President Joe Biden.
The loose-lipped veep played it straight with the uential funnyman, defending the Obama Administration's efforts to pass health care reform and turn around the economy. Stewart, who is known for holding the feet of politicians to the fire with his smart-alec wit, mostly went along with Biden, poking fun at Republicans.
When Biden claimed that "we're getting resistance" from Congress on reforms, Stewart gasped sarcastically, "Stop it!"
The vice president touted his party's big tent, noting there are "moderates, liberals and conservatives" within the Democrat caucus, Stewart interjected, "And communists," a poke at Republican efforts to marginalize Dems.
Before the show, an NYPD car clearing a path for Biden's motorcade T-boned a livery cab on the

West Side of Manhattan. Two detectives and the livery driver were treated and released from a nearby hospital.

MR. OBAMA'S TASK (NYT)
New York Times, November 19, 2009
There is no doubt that the prospects for success in Afghanistan are so bleak right now because former President George W. Bush failed for seven long years to invest the necessary troops, resources or attention to the war. But it is now President Obama's war, and the American people are waiting for him to explain his goals and his strategy.
Mr. Obama was right to conduct a sober, systematic review of his options. We all know what happens when a president sends tens of thousands of Americans to war based on flawed information, gut reactions and gauzy notions of success. But the political reality is that the longer Mr. Obama waits, the more indecisive he seems and the more constrained his options appear.
It has been more than eight months since Mr. Obama first announced his strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, warning Americans that, for them, the border between the two - where Taliban and Qaeda forces have found safe haven - is "the most dangerous place in the world." And it has been more than a month since his top general in Afghanistan asked for 40,000 more troops, warning that "failure to gain the initiative" over the next year could make it impossible to defeat the Taliban.
.
Americans are deeply anxious about the war. As the debate among his advisers has dragged on, and became increasingly public, many are asking whether the conflict is necessary or already a lost cause. Democratic leaders are among the loudest questioners.
It has become a clich? in Washington that there are only bad choices in Afghanistan. But it seems clear that this is not the time for a precipitous withdrawal, nor can the United States cling to the status quo while the Taliban gains ever more territory and more power. To move forward, Mr. Obama needs to explain the stakes for this country, the extent of the military commitment, the likely cost in lives and treasure and his definition of success. Mr. Bush failed to do all of that in Afghanistan and Iraq.
America's allies, many of whom are looking for a way out, also need to hear why their troops should continue to risk their lives. There is no chance in Afghanistan unless President Hamid Karzai separates himself from his corrupt associates and Pakistan's leaders step up their fight against the Taliban and other extremists.
Mr. Obama said on Wednesday that he would soon provide "a lot of clarity" on his Afghanistan strategy. These are some of the things the world needs to hear.
WHAT ARE THE STAKES? We agreed with the president in August when he described Afghanistan as a war of necessity. In a speech, he warned that if the Taliban insurgency were left unchecked it "will mean an even larger safe haven from which Al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is fundamental to the defense of our people."
Since then, some of his top advisers have raised doubts about the urgency and even the necessity of the war. The national security adviser, Gen. James Jones, said in October that there were "less than 100" Qaeda members operating in Afghanistan without bases or the "ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies." He said he didn't "foresee the return of the Taliban" and that the "next step in this is the sanctuaries" in Pakistan.
Vice President Joseph Biden has been even more insistent that the real front is across the border and that attacking extremists on both sides could be better accomplished with a lighter footprint in Afghanistan and Predator strikes and special operations raids. Other officials argue that the Taliban may have learned a lesson and might be open to a deal that barred Al Qaeda from its territory.
Mr. Obama needs to address these arguments - to say whether he still considers fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan to be central to American security and why. Does he still believe a Taliban victory in Afghanistan would mean a "larger safe haven" for Al Qaeda? And how does he see the relationship between the war in Afghanistan and efforts to hold off extremists in a nuclear-armed Pakistan? If the Taliban were to win in Afghanistan, would they be less or more likely to threaten Pakistan?
In March, Mr. Obama warned that, for Afghans, a "return to Taliban rule would condemn their

country to brutal governance, international isolation, a paralyzed economy and the denial of basic human rights," especially to women and girls. We need to hear whether he still believes Americans have a duty to stop that.

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE WAR? In March, President Obama said his goal was to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future." He also argued that bullets and bombs would not be enough to drive the Taliban back. In Afghanistan, American forces and a surge of civilian advisers must "advance security, opportunity and justice" for the Afghan people, "not just in Kabul, but from the bottom up in the provinces."

Given that, no one in the White House should have been surprised when Mr. Obama's chosen commander, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, came back with an ambitious counterinsurgency plan, although his request for 40,000 more troops was clearly higher than Mr. Obama and his aides had wanted to hear.

If Mr. Obama no longer believes that a counterinsurgency is necessary or feasible, or if he wants to set less-ambitious goals (there has been talk of securing a smaller number of cities while speeding up training of the Afghan Army), then the American people need to hear why he changed his mind and how he intends to move forward.

Mr. Obama will also have to address his vice president's proposal. We share Mr. Biden's anxiety that a larger American military presence might alienate more Afghans than it wins over. But we are also skeptical that a war against Al Qaeda can be fought from a distance. Drones and commandos still need bases, and Pakistan is not likely to provide them. They need "actionable" intelligence, which could dry up with fewer American troops on the Afghan side of the border.

ARE THERE CREDIBLE PARTNERS? There is almost no chance of holding off the Taliban (or plotting an eventual American withdrawal) without a minimally credible Afghan government and security forces.

The Taliban's medieval ideas and brutality are anathema to most Afghans. We see that in the courage of the Afghan families who defy the Taliban by sending their daughters to school. But the corruption of the Karzai government, and its failure to provide the most basic services and security, have caused many of its citizens to decide that they have no choice but to submit to the Taliban.

Even after his supporters were caught trying to steal the election, Mr. Karzai remains shamelessly, insultingly undaunted. Mr. Obama must make clear to both Mr. Karzai and the American people the sweeping changes required to build a credible Afghan government. If there are other, better partners, competent cabinet members or provincial officials, then Americans need to hear how Mr. Obama plans to empower them.

Mr. Obama should be candid about his administration's halting progress. In March, he pledged to send "agricultural specialists and educators, engineers and lawyers" across Afghanistan to relieve the burden on American troops and help the government "serve its people." There are disturbing reports that the situation on the ground is so dangerous that many of these advisers cannot leave Kabul. It was chilling to read in The Times last week that when the ambassador in Kabul asked for additional civilian staff, the State Department turned down some of his requests because of budget constraints and a decision to cap the number at 1,000.

There will never be enough American troops on the ground to defeat the Taliban or provide security for Afghans. Mr. Obama must explain his plans for building a minimally functional Afghan Army and police force. More trainers are needed, but as The Times reported earlier this month, even that is no guarantee of success. According to reviews by American officials, the effort has been hobbled by a high dropout rate for recruits, "a lack of competent and professional" Afghan leadership "at all levels," widespread illiteracy and corruption.

.

WHAT WILL IT COST? Mr. Bush cynically tried to cover up the heavy costs of the Iraq and Afghan wars and cooked the financial books with repeated "supplemental" financing requests. Mr. Obama has done far better and needs to continue to tell the truth.

The human cost will continue to rise if the number of forces rises. Mr. Obama should also acknowledge the cost in military readiness and the stress of repeated deployments on troops and their families. On the financial side, the Pentagon has already spent more than $150 billion on the war. While estimates are difficult, analysts say that for every 10,000 additional troops deployed,

the annual cost will rise by at least another $10 billion. Americans need to hear how those costs will be met, even though the choices - raising taxes, cutting spending or more borrowing - are unappealing in a time of recession and high deficits.
IS THERE A WAY OUT? Finally, Mr. Obama promised on Wednesday to outline an "endgame." Given Afghanistan's desperate state, we are skeptical that he can lay out a firm timetable for withdrawal. But there are certainly benchmarks that he can offer. (Mr. Obama promised that in March, but the nation has yet to hear an accounting.)
There must be a way to measure progress or failure. Americans need to know the war will not go on forever.

THE FIRST LADY THANKS TRAILBLAZING SERVICE WOMEN (ABC)
By Whitney Ksiazek
ABC News, November 19, 2009
"It's never been an easy path; I can only imagine how challenging it has been and continues to be. I know that some of you have faced skepticism, ridicule, some of you had to contend not just with the challenge of doing your jobs but with others perception that you weren't up to the job strictly because of your gender," the First Lady said as she thanked over 130 veterans that attended the East room tea at the White House.
Dr. Jill Biden gave the opening remarks, reaffirming the administration's commitment to raising awareness about the special circumstances women face in the military. She also took the opportunity to reiterate her and the first lady's' pledge to encourage all Americans to support the military through acts of service.
The First lady went off script to single out a few "firsts" that were in attendance, "along the way, you all broke one "brass ceiling" after another." She recognized the first female four star general, the first woman in the Navy to be promoted to Master Chief, the first woman in the Army Reserve to be promoted to the general officer rank, the first woman in the Army to receive the Expert Field Medical Badge and the first African American woman to serve as Chief Nurse at Walter Reed Hospital.
She accredited General Wilma Vaught for the event, who suggested to her that she should follow in the tradition of Eleanor Roosevelt and host a tea for service women earlier this year.
"We know that our servicemen and women's sacrifices are their families' sacrifices as well," the First Lady and Dr. Jill Biden said that they have learned over the course of the year that "service doesn't just end with the person wearing the uniform. "
Mrs. Obama reminded the distinguished guests that their legacy was more than just their own service, but that their legacy will be measured in the service of every woman who follows in the trails that they've blazed.
The First Lady announced that she was proud to sponsor a new Coast Guard cutter in honor of Coast Guard Commander Dorothy Stratton, who led the SPARS during World War II.
She summed up the spirit of the history of women in uniform in one phrase, "watch me."
"Watch me succeed. Watch me risk everything I have for the country I love. Watch me do my part to protect this nation and protect this union. Watch me."
Secretary Napolitano and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. James Cartwright also gave short remarks and thanked the attendees.
FLOTUS Fashion Watch: The First Lady wore a high-waisted periwinkle pencil skirt paired with a short sleeved patterned blouse with a purple bow.

VOLUNTEERS ASSEMBLE CARE PACKAGES FOR FEMALE TROOPS (WJLA)
WJLA, November 19, 2009
WASHINGTON - Dozens of helping hands spent hours assembling care packages for people they didn't even know.
The USO-sponsored Package Stuffing Party for Women attracted about 100 volunteers to the Rayburn House Office Building Wednesday. They filled care packages with mascara, razors, lipstick and hair bands for female soldiers serving overseas.
U.S. Marine Corps Major Justin Constantine was wounded in 2006 while serving in Iraq (web | news) . He knows how much these gifts from back home make a difference to those overseas.
"Getting something like this is going to help make their day a little easier," Maj. Constantine said.

"It's fantastic and that's what this is all about. A lot of the women don't get female specific items in the care packages, so this is huge for them."
ABC 7 Talkback:
Click Here to Comment on this Story
This is the first time the USO has tailor made its care packages for women in the military. Volunteer Nancy Fiscus served in the Navy. Her husband is on his second tour of duty in Iraq.
"When we do the other care packages they don't specifically go to a woman," Fiscus said. "There's not the smelly stuff, there's not the special stuff that we need as a woman."
Jill Biden, the wife of the Vice President Joe Biden, volunteered her time to pack care packages. Her stepson Beau served in Iraq.
"As a military mom I have seen first hand how acts of kindness and service like today's effort can help improve the life of a serviceman," Jill Biden said.
The volunteers assembled 2,000 care packages, which should begin arriving overseas in about three weeks.

PALIN HITS THE (BOOK) TRAIL (POL)
By Ben Smith
Politico, November 19, 2009
If Sarah Palin were running for president, this is where she'd come: The outskirts of a second city in the conservative heartland of Western Michigan, where thousands gathered Wednesday to see her, shake her hand and have her sign their copies of "Going Rogue."
And if she were running for president, she'd be doing about what she did Wednesday, under the watchful eyes a half-dozen capable advance hands, veterans of the White House and the McCain campaign, who herded the press and the public into even lines. She had a VIP list for key local conservatives, shuttling them discreetly to the front of the line. She had a few talking points, tailored for the local area, to deliver after she stepped down with a big smile from her big bus, handing baby Trig off to an aide after her four-inch heels hit the sidewalk outside a shopping mall Barnes & Nobles, where she held her first book signing.
"They deserve more credit than they're getting for the level of early organization that they have," observed John Yob, a Grand Rapids political consultant who served for a time as political director of John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign.
The stop in Grand Rapids felt like a political campaign event, not a book tour. For a woman written off as a disorganized celebrity on a tour run by monomaniacal book publicists, Palin and her aides were clearly thinking politics.
Yob was ushered past the rope line with his father, Chuck, a former Republican National Committeeman and regional power broker. The elder Yob penned an open letter to Palin after McCain announced that he was abandoning Michigan, cheering her public dissent from the campaign strategy, telling her she'd "kicked Joe Biden's butt in the debate," and inviting her to "come to Michigan immediately."
Also there were the minority leader of the Michigan House, Kevin Elsenheimer, and Joanne Voorhees, the conservative Kent County Republican Party chairwoman who was briefly in the news for abruptly cancelling an event for former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, on the grounds that hosting a moderate would be breaking with Republican "roots." Two local state Representatives, Bob Genetski and Dave Agema, both devout Christian conservatives, were also invited to meet Palin.
The logistics weren't perfect: The Kent County Republicans could be heard muttering that they'd been rushed past the former Alaska governor. But Chuck Yob said he was pleased after an advance man walked him and his son to the front of the line, and Palin reacted with pleased surprise to their presence.
"Oh my God, that's neat," she said.
Palin's roadshow travels in a campaign-style bus painted to match the cover of her book, with a giant picture of Palin and Facebook and Twitter logos. She emerged with a wave for the adoring crowd, which had begun massing 24 hours earlier, and a few words for the television cameras.
Her staff was made up of volunteers: Jason Recher, a campaign advance man whom she describes in glowing terms in her book, and John Roberts, a former White House staffer, who steered her through the media scrum after she handed off her son. Also on the bus was an aide to

her Political Action Committee, former RNC Finance Director Tim Crawford.
Western Michigan - an "awesome area of this great land" - can be rescued "if we apply some good free enterprise principles in our federal government," she said in a brief interview with reporters, where she dismissed Newsweek's decision to put her on its cover in running shorts as "cheesy."
"I would never have posed for Newsweek in shorts," she said of the picture, which was taken for an article in Runner's World that ran last August.
Grand Rapids was where Palin first "'went rogue' trying to reach out during the campaign," she writes in "Going Rogue," and it's the beginning of a tour that will retrace many of the stops on the Republican primary in Palin's demonstration of how the contest might have looked if she'd had her way.
Palin, meanwhile, ends "Going Rogue" with a tribute to the state.
"I'm thinking when I get back, I'll bake the kids a cake. And I'll pull out a road map - I want to show Piper the way to Michigan," she writes in the final line of her book.
The state seemed to be returning her affection Wednesday, as locals began lining up Tuesday evening outside the bookstore. By 5:00 a.m. Wednesday, hours before her appearance, the store had already handed out more than 500 wristbands entitling their bearers to a place on line. Aides said that in all, over 1,000 people had their books signed, and hundreds more came for a glimpse.
"She's one of us. She doesn't seem like a Washington elite," said Denese Crouch, a homemaker who lives outside Grand Rapids, echoing the dominant theme in a canvass of the long line, which was the ease of identifying with Palin. "She seems to figure solutions to problems like I'd do with my own family," Crouch said.
Indeed, though the line was broadly Republican, Palin's persona and her outsider status seemed to trump any particular issues with most of her admirers.
"She stands for everything I believe. I wear a suit and nylons and pumps to work" while loving nature, said Kim VandeKoppel, who runs a printing business in Grand Rapids, and who also praised Palin's "Christian beliefs."
At the front of the line was Robin Case, 44, who'd driven the previous evening from Traverse City and who sat at the front of the line in sweatpants giving an endless series of interviews to local and national reporters. "What she represents is what I'm standing in line for," she said repeatedly. "She's like you and me -- someone who represents me when we're sitting around the table like other normal folks."
Case said she stopped working to take care of her in-laws, who suffer from dementia and were driven into poverty and onto Medicaid when "they got into that donut hole with prescriptions" she said, referring to a much-criticized provision of 2003 Republican legislation.
Her criticism, a reporter noted, sounded a bit like President Barack Obama's. What did she think of his health care plan?
The politicians currently debating health care "just want to line their pockets" she responded. "Sarah Palin's not like that."
The event also drew its share of more ideological conservatives. Bob Weinert, 56, a fencing salesman from Lansing, said he'd heard Rush Limbaugh say recently that Palin is "the most conservative candidate out there." She represents, he said, "limited government and traditional values," including "putting homos back in the closet."
"And putting Christmas in the stores," added his wife, Rexanna, who said she felt she could trust the "down-to-earth" Palin.
A few minutes later, a diffident young man wandered by with a handmade "Homos for Palin" t-shirt until he encountered a mall security guard.
"You've got to zip it up or leave," said the security guard and the young man, who said he was a college student but wouldn't give his name, complied.
Palin's tour will take her through the battleground states where, she writes, she felt the McCain campaign made her pull her punches. There are stops in Fort Wayne, Indiana and Fairfax, Virginia, Florida's The Villages, and the Missouri Ozarks.
Michigan, though, is a particular preoccupation of hers, despite its place as the ancestral state of the presumptive 2012 GOP front runner, Mitt Romney, whose father was governor.
Be a part of the daily political debate with PROJECT POLITICO powered by YouTube. Click here to submit your video now and be featured on POLITICO.com.

VICE PRESIDENTIAL *NEWS CLIPS*

PRODUCED FOR THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

TO: **THE VICE PRESIDENT AND STAFF**

DATE: **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2009 -- 6:15 AM EST**

TODAY'S EDITION

Wilmington News Journal Stories

Plouffe: Castle's 'Independent Profile' Will Be Challenged (WILNJ)..... 2
Prisons To Divide Health Contracts Into Parts (WILNJ)..... 2
Legislators Not Ready To Commit On Casinos (WILNJ)..... 4
Being First Lady (WILNJ)..... 5
Debate Heated On Proposed Apology For Slavery From State (WILNJ)..... 6
Town Urges Ban On Driver Texting (WILNJ)..... 7
Program To Restore Natural Habitat Shows Success (WILNJ)..... 8
Many Numbers To Reach Del. Government (WILNJ)..... 9
UD Community Pumped For Blood-drive Challenge (WILNJ)..... 12
New Learning Environment At Air Mobility Museum (WILNJ)..... 13
Working Together For Young Ones (WILNJ)..... 13
Doctors Reject New Screening Guidelines (WILNJ)..... 15
Thanksgiving Is All About The Turkey (WILNJ)..... 16
Autumn's Final Gifts (WILNJ)..... 18
Liquor Store Clerk Had 'No Choice' (WILNJ)..... 20
Child Pornographer Gets 30 Years (WILNJ)..... 21
Driver Alive After His Pickup Is Hit By Train (WILNJ)..... 22
Police Investigate Two Newark Heists (WILNJ)..... 22
N.J. Man Says His Life Ruined By Link To Prostitutes' Slayings (WILNJ/AP)..... 23

Wilmington News Journal Editorials

China's Clear, Tough Message: Clean Up Your Financial Mess (WILNJ)..... 24
Such Galling Waste Requires Vigilance In Tracking Spending (WILNJ)..... 25

Biden In The News

Senate Health Plan Seeks To Add Coverage To 31 Million (NYT)..... 26
Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (NYT/AP)..... 28
Senate Health Bill Is Unveiled (WSJ)..... 29
Reid Bill Will Cost $849 Billion (POL)..... 31
Reid Plan Ups Pressure On Moderates (POL)..... 32
Senate's $849 Billion Health Bill Widens Coverage, Cuts Deficit (BLOOM)..... 35
Reid Pushes Holdouts To Vote For Health Bill Debate (Update2) (BLOOM)..... 37
Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (AP)..... 39
Daschle Is Still Go-to Guy On Healthcare (HILL)..... 41
Reid Rolling Out Big Guns To Push Healthcare Bill To 60 Needed Votes (HILL)..... 41
Senate Dems Take $849B Step Toward Healthcare Reform (HILL)..... 43
Landrieu Reax (POL)..... 45
As 2010 Looms, GOP Lays Its Bets On Opposing Health-care Reform (WP)..... 46
ABC: Stimulus Website..... 48
Number Of Stimulus Jobs Created Called Into Question (WSJ)..... 49
GAO Calls For Clearer Guidance From Administration For Reporting Use Of Stimulus Funds (WP)..... 50
Job-counting Help Is Needed (WP)..... 51
Biden: Jobs Will Lag By 12 To 18 Months (NPR)..... 52
Biden Says Errors On Recovery.gov Will Be Fixed (CNN)..... 52
Feds: False Congressional Districts Removed From Stimulus Site (CNN)..... 52
Oops. Feds Add 45 Congressmen (OMAHA)..... 53
Where Did That Stimulus Money Go? (MINNST)..... 54
Fact-Checking Biden's Stimulus Fact-Check (ABC News)..... 55
No Gaffes, Few Laughs For Biden's Sitdown With Stewart (NBC DFW)..... 55
Mr. Obama's Task (NYT)..... 56
The First Lady Thanks Trailblazing Service Women (ABC)..... 58
Volunteers Assemble Care Packages For Female Troops (WJLA)..... 59
Palin Hits The (book) Trail (POL)..... 60

Online Version
Visit www.bulletinnews.com/vp for searchable archive, interactive story index, and links to complete stories where appropriate.

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES

Plouffe: Castle's 'Independent Profile' Will Be Challenged (WILNJ)

By Nicole Gaudiano, News Journal Washington Bureau

Wilmington News Journal, November 18, 2009

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama's campaign manager said Rep. Mike Castle's votes against health care reform and the economic stimulus package will hurt his bid for election to the U.S. Senate in 2010.

David Plouffe, a Delaware native, said he hasn't been following the race that closely. But he hit on themes voiced by other Democrats when asked on Tuesday how Democrats would mount a winning campaign against Castle.

"This was someone who had developed somewhat of an independent profile," said Plouffe, who is on tour with his new book chronicling the Obama campaign, "The Audacity to Win." "I think that's going to be challenged now given his recent behavior."

The Democratic National Committee began running a radio ad on WXCY in Wilmington this week, targeting Castle's vote against health care reform. Castle objected to the cost and various other elements of the bill.

The DNC also circulated poll results from the Susquehanna Polling & Research, showing Delaware Attorney General Beau **Biden** beating Castle by five points in a hypothetical race. **Biden** is expected to run for the remainder of his father Vice President Joe **Biden**'s term, but has not declared his candidacy.

"I don't buy that Mike Castle can't be beat," said Plouffe.

Though Plouffe will be helping the DNC and administration "broadly" on political issues, he said he will be doing very little political consulting next year.

Would he advise Beau **Biden** to jump into the race?

"It's rightly more of a personal decision," Plouffe said.

Plouffe said he and his former campaign rival Steve Schmidt will return occasionally to their shared alma mater, the University of Delaware, as they develop a center for political communication at the school. Schmidt served as campaign manager for Republican Presidential nominee, Sen. John McCain of Arizona.

"It's exciting," he said. "We disagree about many things, but we agree on the need to continue to produce young men and women who want to get involved in politics of both parties and this will be a good way to do it."

Prisons To Divide Health Contracts Into Parts (WILNJ)

By Esteban Parra, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Details on how the state will divide its inmate health-care contract -- which has been under federal scrutiny for three years -- were released Wednesday by the Department of Correction.

Rather than having a single health care provider, prison officials are breaking the contract into 10 smaller agreements focusing on specific services. The change comes a month after Corrections Commissioner Carl C. Danberg announced he was ending a contract next year with St. Louis-based Correction Medical Services (CMS), which has been criticized for providing inadequate health care despite being paid more than $130 million over three years.

"We expect this flexibility, and the increased competition it is expected to provide, will foster improved medical care and cost savings," Danberg said. "The Department spent significant time

exploring alternative solutions to the way we contract for medical services. We believe this alternative will allow for large and small service providers to bid on the areas that fall within their specialization."

Delaware entered an agreement with the federal government to improve prison health care in 2006 following stories by The News Journal that uncovered problems and high inmate death rates, especially from AIDS and suicides. The 2005 series of stories also pointed to poor medical treatment for cancer, meningitis, hepatitis and other communicable diseases and bacterial infections.

Joshua W. Martin III, who leads a team appointed by the state and federal governments to monitor progress, issued a report in September saying it is unlikely the department will be in full compliance when the agreement expires next month.

If the state does not meet the deadline, the federal government can sue to take over the prisons or extend the agreement.

The new contract is posted on the department's Web site and the winning bidders could take over by July 1, 2010 -- the day after CMS' current contract ends. CMS also can bid on all or parts of the new contract.

Interested companies can bid on one or more of these services or they can bid to manage the entire health care program.

The DOC is seeking bidders for medical, nursing, mental health, dental, female health care and pharmacy services. It also is seeking to contract "specialty consultation," which includes examining the use of off-site specialists and negotiating contracts for providers to go onsite, as well as "utilization review services," whose responsibilities include monitoring integrated information concerning care.

Also on the list are substance abuse treatment and inpatient hospital services, which include critical care, inpatient case management and discharge planning.

The new contract also will have a "shared risk," with the DOC to payfor certain costs to prevent medical providers from limiting inmate care to maximize their profits.

Danberg has said he is not sure if the new contract format would reduce costs, adding that results he's seen across the country are mixed. While more companies competing for more bids would likely be financially better for the state in the short run, managing a larger number of vendors could become a problem as it increases other costs, such as hiring more people to oversee vendors.

Prison experts have given the new process mixed reviews.

Jeff Eiser, a former prison administrator in Ohio who is now a private consultant, said bidding out the prison medical contract in smaller parts would result in better care. But Dr. Robert Cohen, who was appointed by state and federal courts to monitor prisons in five states, said the best way for Delaware to save money and improve prisoner health care would be to reduce the number of inmates by about a third.

The Rev. Christopher Bullock, senior pastor of New Canaan Baptist Church and co-founder of the Delaware Coalition for Prison Reform and Justice, said he is glad to see the CMS contract ending, adding he hopes state officials reject any CMS bids based on the company's record.

In addition to lawmakers having a say in the selection process, Bullock said he would like to see the public have input too because it is paying for the services.

Though he is happy the CMS chapter is coming to an end, Bullock said he is concerned that too many venders might be difficult to manage.

"There's a lot of questions if it's going to be done that way," Bullock said. "You know, sometimes when you have too many cooks in the kitchen the meal doesn't come out right.

"But if you have one chef who is in charge, then the meal always comes out better. I hope we're not putting too many cooks in the kitchen."

Legislators Not Ready To Commit On Casinos (WILNJ)

By Ginger Gibson, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Even as more developers come forward with hopes -- and funding -- to build a casino in Wilmington, many lawmakers are reserving judgment on whether they will support an expansion of gambling.

Senate Minority Whip Liane Sorenson said she doesn't have enough information to decide whether adding new casinos is a good idea. If an addition can provide new jobs, she might be willing to support it, she said.

"I think it will be helpful to have more information," Sorenson said.

Others, like Senate Majority Leader Patricia Blevins, D-Elsmere, say their mind is almost made up, but they'll wait for the results of a study of the impact of new gambling venues.

"It would take a lot of convincing for me to come to a point where I would think it's a good idea to have additional venues," Blevins said.

If the study finds that none of the existing casinos will be affected and new venues will only mean more jobs and higher state revenues, Blevins said, she could be persuaded to support an expansion.

House Majority Leader Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, would like to see additional venues in Sussex County and possibly in Wilmington.

Schwartzkopf said expanded gambling will only bring more jobs to the area and he is confident the study will support his view.

Only if the study concludes that Delaware would lose jobs and tax revenues would Schwartzkopf be persuaded otherwise, he said.

The study everyone seems to be waiting for was part of an agreement among lawmakers, Gov. Jack Markell and the state's three established casinos when sports betting and table games were approved. Markell supported new venues last year but backed down, agreeing to a study of the possible impact.

The study, which is being conducted by TMG Consulting from New Orleans, is expected to be completed by the end of December.

When lawmakers return to session in January they will likely be asked to vote on whether additional venues should be permitted. Under Schwartzkopf's proposal, one additional venue -- DelPointe Resort and Racino -- would be allowed to add slot machines and table games.

Rep. Dennis P. Williams, D-Wilmington North, has co-sponsored an amendment to the bill that would also create a casino district in Wilmington, where city and state officials would be empowered to authorize another venue.

To complicate the issue, table games still need a final legislative vote from lawmakers, including signing off on regulations and the tax levels.

Schwartzkopf said he won't bring the table games legislation to the floor for a debate unless the House is also willing to consider the measure to approve new venues.

Williams, who is hoping to join forces with Schwartzkopf to get both measures approved, said he doesn't think a newer proposal by Kevin Flynn, a Philadelphia real estate developer, and George Miller, a lawyer-entrepreneur in Atlantic City who worked with Donald Trump, to build a facility on the Christina River is feasible.

Williams said the Seventh Street site would require a large infrastructure overhaul including a new bridge that would cost at least $9 million. Even if developers offer to pay for the bridge, Williams said he would be worried that the state would get stuck with the bill.

Williams said he suspects there are lots of developers ready to vie for the chance to open a casino in Wilmington, including many who already operate casinos in other areas.

"They just haven't flipped their cards yet," Williams said.

Being First Lady (WILNJ)

By Mary Alice Garrett, Special To The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

The role of first lady of Delaware has advantages and a few disadvantages.

This was the conclusion of the current governor's wife and two former governors' wives who spoke earlier this month at DuPont Country Club in Rockland. The occasion was "Campaigns, Canapes and Chicken Dinners: A Conversation with Delaware First Ladies," a fundraiser sponsored by Fresh Start, a charitable branch of Wilmington Women in Business.

The conversation was with Carla Markell, wife of Gov. Jack Markell; Martha Carper, wife of U.S. Sen. Tom Carper; and Jane Castle, wife of U.S. Rep. Mike Castle.

"What was the biggest surprise about being first lady?" asked moderator Nancy Karibjanian, former anchor for WHYY's "Delaware Tonight" and now an adjunct professor at the University of Delaware.

"The biggest surprise is I'm enjoying it more than I expected. It's really a lot of fun," said Markell. Castle said being first lady of Delaware "is a lot more visible" than being a congressional wife. Carper concurred, adding, "There's more of a defined role being first lady."

Both Markell and Carper said their children prefer their fathers not accompany them on their activities. However, "they do it all the time," noted Carper. "They say it's better without him."

Castle said "there are challenges" to having her husband shop with her in a supermarket. "I tell Mike 'Stay in the car.' "

Carper recalled her husband coming to a birthing class in a tuxedo and bringing a briefcase into the delivery room.

The women were asked how they maintain their own identities. "I refer to the first lady as not really me and in the third person," said Markell. Castle said maintaining separate identities is a priority for her and her husband.

Do their spouses ask them for advice? Markell said although they discuss issues, her husband usually goes fast asleep once his head hits the pillow. "If he really listened to me, I don't know that he would have run for governor," Markell said, smiling at the audience.

"I do manage to weigh-in on issues," Castle added. Carper said they "don't debate. We're sort of like real people. We don't have a lot of heavy conversations."

Does publicity about their husbands bother them?

"It's part of being in public life," said Castle. Markell and Carper agreed. "The children read the blogs. They think it's funny," added Markell. She reads the newspaper every day. "I don't internalize everything they [the media] say."

All three said they would never consider running for public office themselves. Markell said although "Jack loves what he's doing, I don't think I would really salivate to do it again." She added that the last governor's race was long, but "it was a very congenial race." She noted that contender John Carney was very considerate.

Castle closed by saying, "We're gearing up for a big race," referring to the 2010 U.S. Senate race. "It's 363 days from today," she told the audience of 250.

Markell met her husband while both were students at Newark High School. They went on to graduate from the University of Delaware. They've been married for 19 years and have two children, Molly and Michael. Carla Markell has worked in corporate training and human resources. She's also been a mentor to several at-risk students, and she's an advocate for the arts.

A native of Brandywine Hundred, Castle is also a UD graduate. She married then-Gov. Mike Castle in 1992 and was a first lady only six months before he was elected congressman. Jane Castle worked on Capitol Hill for 10 years and later for a Washington architectural/engineering firm. She's been active in the community, serving on the boards of United Way of Delaware, Mental Health Association in Delaware, Literacy Volunteers of America, Christiana Care and the Wilmington Senior Center.

Born in Boone, N.C., Carper is a graduate of Appalachian State University and the University of Tennessee. In 1986, she married Tom Carper. The couple has two sons, Christopher and Ben, both in college. She joined the DuPont Co. in 1975. She held a number of management positions, including global business manager for Lycra. Since retiring from DuPont, Carper has been become a professor at UD. She's been active with Delaware Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls Inc. of Delaware and Boy Scouts of America.

Fresh Start awards college scholarships to Delaware women "who have faced personal and economic challenges," said president Mary Maloney. More than $60,000 in scholarships was granted to 35 women this year, and 100 women have received more than $300,000 since the nonprofit began in 1996. Details: www.wwb.org.

Debate Heated On Proposed Apology For Slavery From State (WILNJ)

By James Merriweather, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

DOVER -- Amid sometimes frayed tempers, Dover residents offered a range of opinions on whether the Delaware General Assembly should issue an apology for slavery.

Many speakers said an apology would be too little, too late and questioned the sincerity of any such gesture that might be issued by a state that was among the last to formally repudiate slavery. Kathy Doyle, a Campus Community Charter School teacher who swelled the crowd by offering extra credit for attendance to one of her classes, said she was appalled to learn that the state did not ratify the 13th Amendment, which ostensibly ended slavery in 1865, until 1901.

"If Alabama could apologize for slavery," she said, drawing applause from many in the crowd of about 70 residents, "we think that Delaware surely could."

Others insisted, though, that an apology for the ongoing vestiges of slavery -- namely Jim Crow laws that institutionalized racism long after slavery was abolished -- was more appropriate than apologizing for slavery itself.

"I think the apology should be issued for discriminatory laws passed in the 20th century," said Della Sue Robinson, adding that she questioned the validity of an apology coming from people who had nothing to do with slavery.

The debate represented the beginning of the commission's second try to persuade the Dover City Council to pass a resolution -- adopted unanimously by the commission on April 25, 2007 -- calling on the state Legislature to apologize for slavery on behalf of the state. After hearing debate in May 2007, the

council sent the proposal back to the commission with instructions to conduct a series of public forums on the issue.

Sam Hoff, the commission chairman and the primary author of the resolution, said Wednesday night's session was the first of two forums the commission will conduct before the matter is taken back to the council.

In serving notice of Wednesday night's forum, the commission sent a white paper of sorts to council members, noting that the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives and legislatures in six states -- Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Alabama, Florida and New Jersey -- had adopted resolutions of apology for slavery. The letter included the text of all eight resolutions as well as the text of the commission's own proposal -- by which the council would call on the legislature to adopt a resolution "acknowledging and expressing its profound apology for the state's practice of slavery and for the historic wrongs committed against all persons who suffered discrimination and injustice under this dehumanizing system ... ."

At one point, Sen. Margaret Rose Henry, D-Wilmington East, said she had considered introducing legislation to provide an opportunity for a vote on the issue, but reported that she found little support for an apology and didn't file a bill.

Hoff, a political science professor at Delaware State University, has described slavery as the most shameful crime against humanity ever committed in Delaware. He argued that an apology was the first step toward earning forgiveness from blacks and improving race relations in the First State.

At Wednesday night's hearing, several speakers agreed, saying an apology would represent a big step toward reconciliation.

"I came to support the idea of an apology," said 62-year-old James Brooks, a 14-year Delaware resident who first visited the state as an enlisted man at Dover Air Force Base in 1966. "I think it's high time. I think we should have apologized decades ago, when we first knew it was wrong."

Lafayette Bell said that racism and discrimination are still rampant, however, and an apology for slavery would not count for much.

"Even if an apology is given," he said, "it's not going to help African Americans much. Most African Americans don't think its genuine anyway."

Jahi Issa, a history professor at DSU, said history would not judge the state well if an apology was not issued.

"Slavery is not to far behind us," he said. "As the First State, I believe we should have been the first state to apologize for slavery. History is judging us. We don't want to be the last."

Town Urges Ban On Driver Texting (WILNJ)

By Michael Short, The (salisbury, Md.) Daily Times

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

OCEAN VIEW -- Town Council will send a letter to the state, urging officials to ban texting and e-mailing while driving.

In recent months, a number of Sussex County towns have taken similar measures.

Texting while driving has been called a "dangerous practice," and some say it's imperative that there be repercussions for those who drive distracted.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, text messaging is banned for all drivers in 11 states, including Maryland, Virginia and New Jersey. Delaware is one of 10 states that prohibit texting by novice drivers.

"AAA calls for passage of a texting-while-driving ban in Delaware," said Catherine Rossi, spokeswoman for AAA Mid-Atlantic. "AAA discourages motorists from engaging in any distraction while behind the wheel, and texting is the epitome of distracted driving."

In a AAA poll conducted this year, 96 percent of Delawareans supported a texting ban.

Legislation banning texting and e-mailing while driving overwhelmingly passed the House earlier this year and is currently on the Senate Ready List.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Joe Miro, R-Pike Creek Valley, initially sought to bar the use of handheld cell phones, but dropped that provision when it became clear the proposal lacked sufficient support.

"[The bill] is not everything I wanted," Miro said earlier this year. "But I am a guy who listens and compromises when I have to in order to achieve something that will improve the safety of all the people on our roads. I think it is a victory for all of us who want to make Delaware roads safer."

While the proposed law would apply to all motorists, Miro believes it will have the greatest impact on young adults.

"This [bill] would prohibit [texting] and hopefully make sure that they are paying attention to what's in front of them," he said.

Ocean View plans to send its letter to Sen. George H. Bunting, D-Bethany Beach, for review.

While town officials considered enacting their own ban, some believe a state ban would be easier to enforce.

"I don't think we have any way at all of policing it," Councilman Bill Wichmann said. "By the time an officer finds out if they are texting, they'll be out of town."

If enacted, Delaware's legislation would carry a penalty of a $50 fine.

Program To Restore Natural Habitat Shows Success (WILNJ)

By Alex Ruoff, The (salisbury, Md.) Daily Times

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

SEAFORD -- For the past few years, Glenn Lovelace's dream has been to transform nearly all of his 50 acres of land into a natural bird habitat.

So, about three years ago, he let his fields go fallow and last year entered into the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Landowner Incentive Program to get some assistance.

The program has restored and enhanced more than 1,300 acres of natural habitat in Delaware by providing economic incentives to private landowners. But the future of the program is unclear as the federal government has not been able to fund the project since 2006.

Now, state environmental agents are hoping to use what's left in their coffers to support just a few, high-priority areas.

"The commission [which selects the projects] will most likely choose just one big project or some we consider high priority," said Shelley Tovell, an environmental specialist for DNREC's Department of Fish and Wildlife. "We're really looking at the last of the money."

Through the program, Lovelace was able to take about 40 acres of land and create a newly restored home for local birds that have been driven out of the area by a lack of suitable areas to nest.

Through the federally funded assistance program, the state pays private landowners to maintain natural habitat for species of great conservation need, DNREC officials said. Property owners receive technical and financial assistance for their efforts.

Lovelace said he's already seen results on his land.

"I've seen some different birds move in," he said. "I've seen high counts on several different species already."

Tovell said federal aid for the program, provided through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has ended, leaving her uncertain as to whether the program will live on past the barely $200,000 left.

"One of the reasons we had such a great response is that [the program] was funded 75 [percent] through federal funds," she said. "Most programs are a 50/50 split, so this was fairly inexpensive for us."

Tovell said anyone who's already signed a contract is guaranteed their money, but expanding efforts will be impossible without extra funding. While the state has a number of alternative programs, Tovell said LIP's popularity was its economic incentives.

Byron Jefferson, of Lincoln, said he joined the program to preserve nearly 100 acres of his property because he could get a better price than renting it out for farming. He said he's pleased with the results and is glad to be providing natural habitat and renewed forest. When his contract ends, he may not continue to preserve the area if financial aid is unavailable.

Interested landowners may request an application by calling 735-3600. Proposals for 2010 funding will be accepted through Dec. 14.

Many Numbers To Reach Del. Government (WILNJ)

By Ken Mammarella, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Yes, so much information and so much contact between Delawareans and their state government are moving online.

But sometimes -- for people who aren't online, for people who aren't sure where to go or for people frustrated with what they encounter online -- a phone call may be more desirable.

A Wilmington phone book has six pages of state government listings. What follows are toll-free phone numbers that are promoted for connecting to Delaware state government.

The most important numbers

The most important number of them all is 911, for life-threatening medical and public safety.

Dispatchers are ready to direct medical and law enforcement personnel to the rescue. In response to a recent question in Spark about a mattress in the middle of the highway, Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh said "Anytime there's a risk of serious physical injury or a traffic crash, it's absolutely appropriate to call 911." Calls are triaged and divided up among appropriate agencies, he said. Non-emergency number for Delaware State Police is (800) 837-3771.

The new 211 service -- from Delaware Helpline with support from the United Way and the state -- is a quick way to connect to thousands of health and human services programs, including rent assistance, food banks, affordable housing, health resources, mental health resources, child care, after-school programs, care for senior citizens, financial assistance, legal assistance and job training programs.

As helpful as that is, it's only answered during extended weekday business hours. (Delaware Helpline hopes to staff that number 24/7 in a few years). Ditto for the nonprofit's other number, (800) 464-4357.

Hotlines that reach people

The phone book and the state's own Web site list a number of hotlines. These numbers were tested from New Castle County and answered outside of regular business hours. Some numbers were answered by people in other states or by answering services.

Child abuse and emotional problems. (800) 292-9582 connects to the Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families. For emergency help with children's emotional problems, (800) 722-7710 is also maintained.

Crime victims and survivors: (800) 842-8461 connects to a person at state police. (800) 870-1790 is the attorney general's office and goes to voice-mail at off-hours.

Delaware Crime Stoppers: (800) 847-3333.

Diseases and bioterrorism: (888) 295-5156.

Domestic abuse: (800) 743-5754.

Environment. (800) 662-8802. This is a general number for the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, including air and waste management and parks and recreation. Environmental concerns including open burning, chemical spills, pesticide spills, emissions from factories, illegal dumping on land (such as at the three yard-waste sites in New Castle County) and at sea.

Fishing violations, inland bays. (800) 523-3336 is a DNREC number for fishing violations and for polution in the inland bays of Sussex County.

Mental health: (800) 652-2929. This leads to a mobile unit that handles crisis intervention, drug and alcohol crises, pyschiatric emergencies and severe personal, family, or marital problems.

Poison: (800) 222-1222, which is routed to local poison centers no matter where you call from.

Roads: (800) 324-8379 is maintained by the Delaware Department of Transportation. The Transportation Management Center is the place to go to report problems (such as a traffic signal that's not working, debris or wild animals) or ask questions (when's that road repair scheduled to end?).

Sexual violence, sucide and parents thinking of surrendering a baby: Contact Delaware, 761-9100 in New Castle County, (800) 262-9800 downstate.

Smoking Quitline: (866) 409-1858.

Wildlife. (800) 292-3030 is DNREC's Wildlife Operation Game Theft Hotline Operation Game Theft. Tips that lead to the arrest and conviction of people violating state hunting and wildlife laws can lead to rewards of up to $1,000.

Hotlines that reach interactive recordings

Access Delaware: (866) 276-2353, for the status of your state income tax refund or to find polling places or free public Web access.

School closings: (877) 831-7215

Other toll-free numbers

The following numbers are ones that Delaware residents (as contrasted to state employees or businesses) might use to reach state government. A state Web page (http://delaware.gov/egov/portal.nsf/portal/tollfree) lists dozens.

COMPLAINTS, TIPS

Alcohol violations: (800) 393-7327.

Consumer protection, debt management: (800) 220-5424

Fraud, waste, and abuse of state government resources: (800) 553-7283.

Governor's office: (800) 292-9570.

Home health care or hospice agencies: (800) 942-7373.

Housing law violations: 877-544-8626.

Indoor smoking ban violations: (800) 297-5926.

Insurance companies, agents: (800) 282-8611.
Insurance fraud: (800) 632-5154.
Long-term care facilities: (877) 453-0012.
Mosquito control: (800) 338-8181.
Pesticide misuse: (800) 282-8685.
EDUCATION
Delaware Educator Data System: 888-759-9133. For people obtaining teaching certification.
Groves Diploma at a Distance: (888) 321-4723. For adult learners obtaining high school diplomas.
Higher Education Commission: (800) 292-7935. Scholarships, grants and college-prep information.
K-12 education: (877) 838-3787.
School-related crime, including bullying: (800) 220-5414.
Upward Bound: (866) 227-5566. Program to prepare students for college in partnership with the University of Delaware.
HEALTH, PUBLIC WELFARE
Aging, adults with physical disabilities: (800) 223-9074.
Child care licensing: (800) 822-2236.
Child Development Watch: (800) 671-0050. Program for children ages birth to 3 with disabilities or developmental delays.
Deaf-blind children: (800) 292-9590.
Elderinfo insurance counseling: (800) 336-9500. For people with Medicare.
HIV/AIDS: (800) 422-0429.
Immunizations: (800) 282-8672.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, food stamps, subsidized child care and Refugee Cash Assistance programs: (800) 372-2022.
Women, Infants and Children; nutrition and physical activity: (800) 222-2189.
LIBRARIES AND DATA
Delaware Division of Libraries: (800) 282-8696.
Legislative Council Research: (800) 282-8545. Legislative research and the Delaware Register of Regulations.
Library for the Blind/Handicapped: (800) 282-8676.
TAXES
Tax forms: (800) 292-7826.
Tax refund status: (866) 276-2353.
TRANSPORTATION
DART: (800) 355-8080 for customer relations, (800) 652-3278 for reservations.
DelDOT: (800) 652-5600.
Rideshare Delaware: (888) 743-3628.
OTHER CALLS
Agriculture emergencies: 877-831-7217.
Delaware Solid Waste Authority: (800) 404-7080.
Delaware Tourism Office: (800) 441-8846.
Housing: (888-363) 8808.
Juvenile fire setter intervention: (800) 432-8500.

Lottery numbers: (800) 338-6200. Remember, they're not official until they're verified.

Natural Resources and Environmental Control: (800) 922-9283.

State Fire School: (800) 282-8650.

Treasurer: (800) 675-8600. Personal finance tips.

Unemployment benefits: (800) 794-3032. Claim weekly unemployment insurance benefits by telephone.

Utilities: Public Advocate -- (888) 607-2427 -- advocates for consumers on utility rates. Public Service Commission -- (800) 282-8574 -- regulates utilities.

Veterans Affairs: (800) 344-9900. Assistance with veterans benefits and burial services.

Vital statistics: (877) 888-0248. Provides copies of birth, death, adoptee and marriage certificates.

Voting and elections: (877) 270-8300.

UD Community Pumped For Blood-drive Challenge (WILNJ)

By April Abel, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

NEWARK -- University of Delaware students and faculty were out for blood Wednesday.

Donating blood, that is.

About 500 people registered to donate blood for the 8th Annual Colonial Athletic Association Blood Challenge, which pits the school against 11 other schools in the athletic conference to collect the most blood donations in a one-day fall drive.

Last year, UD brought in 604 donations. Wednesday's goal: 900 donors.

"The competition is fierce among the schools. UD has won five times but was narrowly beaten by Drexel University for the last three years," said Carrie Aiken of the Blood Bank of Delmarva.

Blood Bank of Delmarva closed its donor centers for the day to provide staff and equipment.

"We can't announce the day's totals until the competition is over in early December," Aiken said.

But the real winners, blood bank leaders said, are the patients who will benefit from the lifesaving blood.

Over the past seven years, the CAA Blood Challenge has raised 17,728 units of blood.

The multipurpose rooms at the Trabant University Center in Newark were bustling Wednesday with a well-orchestrated scene of students and staff.

"We always get a lot of walk-ins," Aiken said.

Doors opened at 7:30 a.m. By 10 a.m., 30 beds were full and people were moving smoothly through the computer screening, donation and all-important snack break and brief monitoring afterwards.

UD nursing student Emily Wagner donates blood at least twice a year.

"I really do it for the cookies," she joked.

UD music faculty member Xiang Gao also said he donates blood regularly.

"As a musician, I give my best to help people. Giving blood is another way of giving my best," he said.

Gao was one of the many donors giving a traditional whole blood donation on a bed in the main donor area.

Along the wall, it got a little more high-tech.

The Blood Bank brought along all four of its ALYX anapheresis machines for this drive.

These fully automated machines allow qualified donors to give twice the amount of red blood cells in one donation.

Donors who meet height and weight criteria -- at least 5 feet 1 inches tall and weighing 130 pounds for men, or 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighing 150 pounds for women -- are offered the opportunity to donate blood via the ALYX machine.

The phlebotomist inserts the needle and line into the donor's arm, and ALYX draws the blood, separates red cells from plasma, and returns a mixture of sterile saline and plasma to the donor.

"The benefit of this is there is no net fluid loss for the donor, and the Blood Bank gets twice as many red blood cells from one donation," said Kathy Armstrong, of the Blood Bank.

Andrew Smith, 19, is a freshman at UD. He was donating via ALYX for the first time, and "felt no different" than when he gave a whole blood donation last year.

Armstrong offered Smith a choice of UD blue or gold elastic gauze to wrap the donation site, and sent him off to the snack table.

"I remember him from when he donated in high school," she said. "It was nice to see a familiar face."

New Learning Environment At Air Mobility Museum (WILNJ)

By The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Students from around the state visited the Air Mobility Command Museum in Dover on Wednesday to celebrate the 11th anniversary of GIS Day, an international even to promote awareness of geographic information systems.

TOP PHOTO: Seaira Williams (right), 10, a McVey Elementary student, lands her plane safely on a flight simulator, with a little help from volunteer David Doyle.

BELOW: With help from volunteer Maggie Legates (right), students put together a map of Europe on the floor using technology they are learning at the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover Air Force Base.

Working Together For Young Ones (WILNJ)

By Edward L. Kenney, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 18, 2009

With three early childhood centers -- and another on the way if the upcoming referendum passes -- the Appoquinimink School District has buttressed with action the belief that children should start learning well before grade school.

But it has not stopped there. Rather than wait for children ages 3 to 5 to enroll in the centers, district leaders have developed an outreach program that trains Middletown-area day care providers to give the children an even earlier head start.

"In the past, the school district and the community providers sort of passed [like ships] in the night, so to speak, yet we're all sharing the same kids," said Sandra Cohee, principal at the Cedar Lane Early Childhood Center. "We give them a more in-depth view of what we do at school. This has opened up a conduit of information."

Cohee, the leaders of the other two early childhood centers and an educational diagnostician make up the leadership in a newly formed Preschool Coalition Committee that plans training for the day care providers.

The district has worked with the providers informally for the past 10 years, beginning when the Appoquinimink Early Childhood Center opened its doors as the first such center in the district, she said.

But this year marks an effort to give the initiative better structure, a move necessitated both because of district growth and the growing number of day care centers in the Middletown area, now about 15.

"There are other districts that are doing similar things, but not as formalized as we are doing it," Cohee said. "It's a great idea. And it really has opened up communication, so we are on the same page as the providers."

"Developing this liaison helps to build a bridge," added committee member Lucia Weathers, assistant principal at the Townsend Early Childhood Center.

Licensed day care providers are required by state law to receive 18 hours of training a year in subjects such as classroom management, parental involvement, developing fine and gross motor skills, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Providers usually have to pay for that training, but the district offers it free, holding sessions as part of evening dinner meetings that have drawn as many as 75 day care people.

Meetings are held every two to three months and are assigned a training theme, Cohee said. One scheduled for January will be about discipline.

Rene Nolen, the principal at the Appoquinimink Early Childhood Center and a member of the Preschool Coalition Committee, said the district also can teach things that will help the children with social skills such as sharing and teamwork, paving the way for the more academic lessons to come.

"Then when they get here, they're ready for reading and words and counting," she said.

"The kindergarten year is so critical," added fellow committee member Kathy Gertley, a district educational diagnostician who used to go out on her own to the day care centers before things got better organized. "It just sets them up for success in their educational career.

"We want them to instill in them the love of learning," she said of the day care providers.

As an owner of the Kiddie Academy childcare center in Middletown, Susan Tudor appreciates the training the district is giving her 20 teachers.

"It's a good opportunity to get those hours and not have to pay for it," she said. "In early childcare, it's definitely not a career you go into to make money. As a business owner, I wish I could say I will pay for all your training, but I can't afford it."

Tudor also likes what the teachers are taking away from the training, which cannot help but benefit the 115 children at her day care center.

"I think it helps educate my teachers, giving them different ideas," she said. "They can kind of feed off each other. I think it gives them a chance to grow together. It keeps my teachers fresh and aware of what's going on out there."

Said Weathers, "Those centers know that we value what they do, and just knowing that helps them to keep coming back."

Doctors Reject New Screening Guidelines (WILNJ)

By Angie Basiouny, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Some Delaware doctors are rejecting new recommendations from a federal panel advising women to wait until age 50 to get routine mammograms and abandon breast self-exams because they do no good.

The physicians said Wednesday they disagree with the reasoning behind the report and are telling patients, many of whom are confused about the news from the independent U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, to stick to conventional guidelines that call for self-exams and routine screenings at 40.

"It certainly was an easy one for me," Dr. Nick Petrelli, director of Christiana Care's Helen F. Graham Cancer Center, said of his decision to continue with current guidelines. "I've experienced this over the years with patients. I've seen it, I've seen the evidence, and we're not going to change."

Petrelli, a surgical oncologist, pointed to the significant reduction in mortality rates in the United States and around the world since women began screening in their 40s and even younger. He also does not see the logic in telling women to not perform self-exams, which often is a first step in early detection of tumors.

"Women know their bodes better than any physician or anybody else," he said. "I see no down side to self-examination. It certainly doesn't cost anything and it's not time consuming."

Cindy DelGiorno figures she would be dead by now if she had followed the new recommendations.

DelGiorno, a teacher at A.I. duPont High School, found a lump in her breast during a self-exam in 2007, when she was 34. A subsequent mammogram revealed a tumor. During chemotherapy, she realized that older women were having a much tougher time battling the disease and the effects of treatment.

"It's absurd. I couldn't believe it," she said of the report. "I don't know who this research group is, but do they want to kill off women? It's disturbing."

In Delaware and across the country, there is a rising chorus of health professionals, politicians and advocacy groups questioning the wisdom of the findings, which contend women in their 40s are more likely to get false-positive tests that can lead to unnecessary biopsies and anxiety.

The recommendations don't apply to women who carry a high risk of breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society reacted swiftly to the report and posted a statement Monday on its Web site that the organization remains with its long-standing position advocating for yearly screenings starting at age 40. The American College of Radiology also was critical of the findings, saying it would result in countless unnecessary deaths each year.

Federal policy unchanged

To ease confusion, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius said Wednesday the task force does not set federal policy and the government's view on screenings at 40 remains unchanged.

"My message to women is simple," she said. "Mammograms have always been an important lifesaving tool in the fight against breast cancer and they still are today. Keep doing what you have been doing for years -- talk to your doctor about your individual history, ask questions and make the decision that is right for you."

That advice is echoed by the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition, an awareness and support organization that runs the state mammography van, which is about to be retrofitted to use the latest in digital imaging.

Coalition Executive Director Vicky Cooke said the office phone has been ringing all week with women wanting to know what they should do. The report has been the topic of debate among staff members for days.

In the end, she said, the group opted to follow the current rules. It's a break from the position taken by the National Breast Cancer Coalition, which has endorsed the new recommendations.

"We're an organization that relies on responsible information, and right now there is a lot of confusion," Cooke said. "So we are going to step back and continue to do what we've always done and operate by the current guidelines."

Officials with the Delaware Division of Public Health declined to be interviewed and released a statement saying they are studying the recommendations and working with the state's Cancer Consortium to determine the implications for Delaware.

Dr. Tom Vaughan, director of women's health and chairman for diagnostic imaging for Bayhealth Medical Center, said he thinks the task force focused too much on the costs, time and other negatives associated with benign tumors and not enough on the benefits of early detection. He said mammograms aren't perfect, but they are powerful tools in helping save lives.

"My experience with an extensive number of biopsies is that most people, even if there is a 1 percent chance that they have cancer, are happy to have this done," he said.

Dr. Wendy Newell, a breast surgeon in private practice with Wolf Creek Surgeons in Dover, agreed with Vaughan and Petrelli from Christiana Care. She said the task force needs to rescind the guidelines and worries that the news will set back decades of work to educate women about early detection.

She's continuing to advise patients to screen at 40 and learn how to conduct self exams.

"They could end up having a more advanced breast cancer if they wait every other year, or they could end up dying," Newell said.

Breast-cancer survivor, Newark resident Terri Stuiber, also is upset with the report and pondered her fate had she followed the advice.

"I would probably not be here right now," she said.

Stuiber found her lump during a self-exam two years ago, when she was 47, and had a bilateral mastectomy. Like DelGiorno, she had no family history of breast cancer.

When she first heard about the report, she thought maybe it was a mistake.

"I went crazy, especially when they said don't even teach breast self-exams," Stuiber said. "I was floored that anybody would come out with that. I have two daughters. I would never want them to take that lightly. I tell them to get educated and have their checkups."

Thanksgiving Is All About The Turkey (WILNJ)

By Molly Murray, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

With Thanksgiving a week away, it's crunch time at TA Farms in Wyoming. So many turkeys, so many platters to fill.

These birds -- raised on a mixture of corn, soybeans and minerals -- are organic, free-range turkeys.

"We grow our own feed, we make our own feed," Dan Palmer said. "It makes them taste juicier and have more flavor."

Then, there are the store-bought birds.

"Created," said Sherrie Rosenblatt, a spokeswoman for the National Turkey Federation, "to fulfill consumer desire for white meat."

These birds were selectively bred for large breasts, lots of white meat and a speedy growth process.

About 90 percent of households in the United States will eat an organic turkey like Palmer grows or the store-bought kind this Thanksgiving. In all, some 46 million turkeys will be sold for the holiday, Rosenblatt said.

But the real purist may want to hone the hunter-gatherer instinct, don the mossy oak camoflauge and bag a wild turkey for the feast.

"They are very good eating," said Matt DiBona, a wildlife biologist with the state Division of Fish & Wildlife.

There's only one problem. Delaware doesn't have a fall hunting season for wild turkey, so unless a hunter planned ahead in spring, a Delaware wild turkey won't be on the Thanksgiving menu.

In some ways, it is a small conservation miracle the state has a season -- or wild turkeys -- at all.

The population in Delaware was wiped out by the mid-1800s and they were pretty much gone from throughout their native, East Coast range in the mid- to late 1800s, said Bob Eriksen, director of conservation operations and a regional wildlife biologist with the National Wild Turkey Federation.

The last wild turkey in New York was killed in 1846. The last wild bird in Connecticut died in 1813.

Extensive deforestation made a 19th century comeback next to impossible, Eriksen said.

Over time, marginal farmland that had been cleared began to revert back to forest. In the early 1960s and 1970s, efforts to bring back the birds began, Eriksen said.

By the end of the 1800s, an estimated 220,000 wild turkeys were left in the continental United States, compared to an estimated 10 million to 12 million when Colonists arrived from Europe, Eriksen said.

Today, there are an estimated 7 million to 7. 5 million birds in 49 states. Eriksen said the only state without a population of wild turkeys is Alaska.

These days, the East Coast is terrific wild turkey habitat because of productive forests with lots of seeds, nuts and berries -- all foods that wild turkeys eat, he said.

Delaware officials began a reintroduction program in Sussex County in 1984. As those birds thrived and more were added, they began a trapping program to introduce birds to Kent County. In early 2002, more birds were brought in from South Carolina and Virginia and released in New Castle County, DiBona said.

There are an estimated 4,000 wild turkeys in the state, he said. "It is probably one of the greatest conservation success stories ever."

Still, the population isn't big enough yet to allow a fall hunting season. The spring season in 2010 is three weeks, starting April 10.

These wild birds are the cousins of the birds that Palmer raises and sells, and also are related to the ones shoppers find in the grocery store.

On that first Thanksgiving, back at Plymouth Rock, the wild turkey dished up by the Wampanoag wasn't something new for the Pilgrims.

Turkeys were first caged and domesticated in Central Mexico more than 2,000 years ago. And when the Spaniards arrived in the new world, they took the bird back to Europe.

Of course, the bird the Pilgrims ate in 1621 was way different than the broad-breasted birds of today's table, and was probably even different from the wild turkeys we see today.

The grocery store birds grow quickly.

Palmer's birds -- even with their all-natural diet -- put on pounds at a speedy rate, going from day-old pullets to dinner-table size in 16 to 20 weeks. A 20-week-old turkey at TA Farms dresses out to 24 pounds.

Wild birds don't have those snowy-white feathers, and they grow much slower. Their diet is different, and because they are foragers, they are much more muscled, Eriksen said.

A wild turkey that hatched back in June won't be nearly as big. The male will weigh 10 to 12 pounds and the female 6 or 7, Eriksen said. A domestic male of the same age would weigh 30 pounds, he said.

Selective breeding has allowed the bigger birds with the white feathers. There is even a farm-raised turkey that grows to 80 pounds, he said.

Imagine fitting that in your oven.

The wild birds aren't as meaty -- diet and a higher level of activity probably have something to do with that, Eriksen said.

But for people who want a wild bird, there is nothing quite like it in the world of hunting, DiBona said.

The birds have exceptional eyesight. Deer, on the other hand, have an exceptional sense of smell.

"We joke that if you could have an animal with the sense of smell of a deer and the eyesight of a turkey, you'd have an unhuntable animal," DiBona said.

It takes lots of preparation to figure out where turkeys are roosting, and a hunter can't talk or move around once the spot is selected. Turkey hunters typically call in the birds using a series of devices that mimic the sounds that turkeys make.

And when they do take a shot, it's at close range.

In hunting, "it's probably the most fun you can have," DiBona said.

Autumn's Final Gifts (WILNJ)

By Nature's Landscapes, By Rick J. Lewandowski

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

With a suddenness out of character with our typical autumnal explosion of foliage colors, this season came to an abrupt and dramatic close.

Somehow, I'd been lulled into taking for granted the late season floral displays and sumptuous colors of foliage that every year seemed to go on for weeks. So you can probably understand my surprise when, with frigid finality, the first killing frost of the season struck with temperatures hovering in the mid-20s.

And, as if to drive the point home, the region was then pummeled by one of the strongest nor'easters in recent memory. Over three days, its winds and driving rains wrenched from the trees most of the remaining leaves not damaged by frost, leaving branches exposed and forlorn.

Frankly, I was left with a hollow feeling that I'd missed the opportunity to fully appreciate autumn.

Even so, I was determined to find some consolation in the pre-winter landscape as nature took one last deep breath before plunging into winter. So, out for a walk I went.

Stark silhouettes of tree trunks with sharp shadows cast on the ground now replaced the deep shade of summer. Oddly attractive, I thought. Had I noticed before?

Shuffling along paths laden with newly fallen wind-blown leaves, I was also reminded of the simple pleasure of being immersed in this sea of brown that parted at the slightest movement of my feet.

Perhaps all wasn't lost after all; in fact, I was starting to feel a little better already.

It was then that I discovered to my delight, and not so unexpectedly as it turns out, that the frost-laden air of early November and harsh treatment by the nor'easter hadn't completely obliterated the last glimmer of autumn's spectacle. In fact, the layered tree canopy had offered its last leaves as a sacrifice to the frigid air, wind, and rain in order to protect the shrubs and perennials lying at its feet.

Indeed, I realized that the garden was more than just the remnants of leaves and branches left behind by frost and storm; there was considerable life left in this late season landscape for us to appreciate.

A gaggle of goodies

Armed with this new perspective, I ran back to grab my camera and laptop so I could share some of the late-season garden joy I'd discovered. I realized there was surely a spot in gardens for these plants, in particular, to extend the season right up to the very precipice of autumn's end.

Honestly, November is probably not at the top of the list for season-ending flower highlights. Yet, in my stroll through the garden some plants really stood out.

Among the best perennials still flowering were the pale lavender-flowered Raydon's Favorite aromatic aster (Symphyotrichum oblongifolium), the deep purple-flowered Georgia aster (Symphyotrichum georgianum), and the pale yellow-flowered Mellow Yellow sunflower (Helianthus angustifolius) as well as the delicate yellow-flowered, multi-stemmed tree, common witch hazel (Hamamelis virginiana).

While colorful foliage is a reliable feature of autumn in our region, a few plants withstood killing frost and storms particularly well, retaining their leaves and color. These plants added an even greater allure to the late-season luster of the garden because of their durability.

The fine textured golden yellow autumn foliage of Arkansas blue star (Amsonia hubrichtii) represents one of only a handful of perennials with colorful autumn foliage and is a colorful companion to the golden autumn foliage of Carolina sweet-shrub (Calycanthus floridus).

Other shrubs such as Mt. Airy fothergilla with its yellowish to pale red foliage, sweet azalea (Rhododendron arborescens) with its fiery red foliage, and oakleaf hydrangea (Hydrangea quercifolia) with foliage colors ranging from green and yellow to purple and wine red, weathered the late autumn conditions admirably, proving their worth.

Even though it is an uncommon garden shrub, Alabama croton (Croton alabamensis) may have offered the most striking late autumn foliage, showcasing pumpkin-orange leaves with silvery undersides.

Each autumn we certainly expect showy fruit displays. Yet, the early departure of most fall foliage this year made fruit an even more important feature for late-season interest.

The dense clusters of lavender-purple berries on American beautyberry (Callicarpa americana) provide some of the most unusual color to be found in the garden. Masses of brilliant red fruit on Winter King hawthorn (Crataegus viridis) and bright yellow fruit of Winter Gold winterberry holly (Ilex verticillata) highlighted their staying power that will insure continued beauty well into winter.

Even American holly (Ilex opaca) with its red fruit displays, provided a special appeal with the early departure of deciduous leaves, reaffirming its important quality as an evergreen tree that keeps the garden interesting even in winter.

Certainly, there are other plants that proved their worth this autumn, but these plants highlight some of late autumn's best performers.

I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention that each year brings with it a unique set of seasonal conditions.

Some years can be quirky; others are not. You might not see all these plants performing well so late each autumn but, in my humble opinion, the pleasure of having them brighten the garden for their normal beauty as well as the off chance that you might even get a few extra days of interest make them well worth the effort.

As gardeners, our powers of observation are often the most important tools we have. Don't be shy. Get outside and study what is happening in the landscape. Keen observations and a curious mind offer innumerable opportunities for us to enhance our gardens.

While autumn is now truly nearing an end, be sure to enjoy the changing light and the drama of contrast in the landscape.

Remember, too, as I've recently rediscovered that, when you least expect it, you're almost sure to learn something new!

Liquor Store Clerk Had 'No Choice' (WILNJ)

By Adam Taylor, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

WILMINGTON -- Before the night clerk at Favors Liquor Store could react Tuesday night, one armed robber jumped through the take-out window and another ran behind the counter.

"One had a gun at his head and the other had a gun at his chest," said Ed Pensky, the store's owner.

Shortly after money was taken from the cash register, the clerk pulled his own gun and shots were fired, Pensky said. The clerk shot one of the men, who ran on North Walnut Street and collapsed about 30 feet away. He was pronounced dead at Christiana Hospital.

Pensky, 67, has owned Favors Liquor Store for more than two years.

Before that, he owned another liquor store for 10 years in northeast Wilmington.

Because both neighborhoods are among the poorest and most violent in the city, Pensky and his employees are well armed.

In addition to the .40-caliber Glock pistol the clerk used in the shooting, police confiscated two guns and a can of Mace in the tiny store that weren't involved in the robbery. One is a .380-caliber pistol kept under the counter in a cigar box and the other is a 12-gauge shotgun kept in a corner.

The man who died was identified Wednesday as 20-year-old Kendel Miller of the 500 block of W. 39th St. in Wilmington. The other man escaped.

Pensky was at his Pike Creek home when the robbery took place around 9:30 p.m. He went to the store and then to the police station.

Pensky said his employee fired because Miller was turning toward him with a gun.

"He knew he was about to get shot," Pensky said. "There was no choice."

Though the investigation isn't complete, it appears the clerk was defending himself, said Wilmington police Master Sgt. Steven Barnes. He also said it's legal to carry nonconcealed weapons in a business and no permits are required.

The weapons are all tools of the trade when it comes to running a liquor store in Wilmington's toughest neighborhoods, Pensky said. When he opened the store Wednesday morning, it still had blood in the doorway. And Pensky had his .38 Sig Sauer pistol hanging from his belt.

"I don't do it to show off; I do it to say to people, 'Please, I don't want any trouble,' " Pensky said.

"I love the liquor business, but it comes with two very wanted, dangerous commodities -- booze and cash," he said.

Pensky only had to fire his gun once before when his High Spirit liquor store at 24th and Jessup streets was robbed several years ago, he said. He fired warning shots into the air and the robbers fled.

Favors was robbed once before since Pensky has owned it. It happened around closing, which Pensky thinks is the most dangerous time, because money from an entire day's work is there.

The store has a video surveillance system, but Pensky said a power surge rendered it inoperable about a month ago and he hasn't gotten it repaired yet, so there is no video of Tuesday's robbery.

Delaware State Police Senior Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh said the department doesn't take a stand on whether it's a good idea for merchants to arm themselves.

"But we do advise that it's always better to comply with someone's demands than to put themselves into harm's way," he said.

Wilmington Councilman Steve Martelli, a former city police officer, said it's not uncommon for small business owners in Wilmington to be armed, especially if they run a business that deals with a lot of cash.

"When I was on the force, we always hoped that they would be responsible gun owners by taking marksmanship and gun safety courses," he said. "We didn't want people out there untrained, trying to be renegades or vigilantes."

Police Chief Michael Szczerba agreed.

"If business owners are going to arm themselves, they should do it in a safe and responsible manner," he said.

Pensky said he had to Mace a regular customer about three weeks ago when he lunged at him in a threatening way. Wednesday, the customer was back at the store and had a friendly conversation with Pensky. "All was forgiven a couple days after the Macing," Pensky said.

Pensky, who is white, said he enjoys interacting with his clientele, which he said is mostly poor and black.

"I go across the street to say hello," he said. "If anything bad happens to someone's family around here, I send them a case of beer and a half-gallon of gin."

But there are sad parts of his business as well.

A 47-year-old customer comes in each morning shaking from alcohol withdrawal before his first half-pint of vodka of the day. Pensky said the man looks older than he is, even though he is 30 years younger.

Mostly, though, Pensky said he has a grand time joking around with his customers.

"I love the liquor business because 99.9 percent of my customers are fantastic," he said. "My wife says I get an adrenaline rush when I'm living on the edge."

Another clerk, Shantae Hughes, 27, was in the back room when Tuesday's robbery took place. She also was present last week when her brother was shot on West Fourth Street. Her brother thought he was about to get into a fistfight, but the other man pulled out a gun and shot him.

His wounds are not life-threatening, she said.

Hughes was back at work Wednesday.

"It's been rough, but I have strong people in my life, so I'm getting through it," she said.

Child Pornographer Gets 30 Years (WILNJ)

By Esteban Parra, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

A 42-year-old New Castle man was sentenced Wednesday to 30 years in prison for producing child pornography, including at least one video and thousands of still images.

In addition to the prison term, District Judge Joseph J. Farnan Jr. sentenced William A. Phillips to 10 years probation. He also will have to register as a sex offender.

Farnan said he found the "criminal conduct to be horrendous" and that Phillips had "raped [his child victim] for the camera."

According to federal attorneys, investigators recovered more than 500 videos and 200,000 images of child pornography stored on some 20 CDs and a computer hard drive.

Most of the illicit videos and images were downloaded from the Internet but several hundred were pictures Phillips took of "Jane Doe 1" at the home that belonged to his family outside Llangollen Estates.

Prosecutors said Jane Doe 1 was located and is safe.

There also was at least one illicit video of Jane Doe 1, apparently created by Phillips, with another female child that was recovered by police. In that case, authorities also believe the child has been accounted for and is safe.

Phillips, who said he had been a pressman at the Cecil Whig newspaper in Elkton for more than 20 years, pleaded guilty in March to one count each of production of child pornography and possession of child pornography.

"While the volume and content of the images seized in this case was shocking in itself, the defendant's willingness to exploit very young children entrusted to his supervision and care is unconscionable," U.S. Attorney David Weiss said. "The sentence imposed ensures that this defendant will never again victimize a child and sends a clear message to others who would engage in similar conduct."

Driver Alive After His Pickup Is Hit By Train (WILNJ)

By Terri Sanginiti, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

A 30-year-old New Castle area man suffered minor injuries when he ignored flashing lights at a railroad crossing on Del. 9 and his vehicle was hit by a train, police said.

The 10:15 a.m. crash shut down Del. 9 south of Del. 141 in both directions for nearly two hours, New Castle City police Lt. Adam Brams said.

Jarrod Penn, of the 100 block of Covington Place, was driving a Ford F-150 north on Del. 9 approaching the railroad tracks, when he drove over them and was hit by the train.

His truck was mangled and overturned, but Penn managed to get out, Brams said.

He was treated on the scene by county paramedics for abrasions to his head, and injuries to his chest and abdomen, county paramedic Assistant Chief Richard D. Krett said.

He was listed in stable condition.

Witnesses told police the Norfolk Southern train was blowing its whistle as it approached the road at 20-30 mph. The engineer told police the lights were flashing, but that has not been confirmed by witnesses.

Penn was cited for disregarding a traffic control device.

Police Investigate Two Newark Heists (WILNJ)

By Ira Porter, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Newark police are investigating two robberies that occurred within hours of each other.

The first took place Tuesday at 8:15 p.m. in the Cherry Hill Manor neighborhood, off Barksdale Road. An 18-year-old man and a 19-year-old woman were walking near Nathan Hale and Ethan Allen courts when a man ran up. He put a gun to the 18-year-old's head, forced him to the ground and took money from his pockets, police said. He briefly pointed the gun at the woman before running.

No description was provided except that the man wore a dark hooded jacket or sweat shirt and was 6 feet tall.

The second robbery involved a University of Delaware student on Prospect Avenue early Wednesday morning.

Shortly after 2:30 a.m., the 21-year-old victim parked his car and was walking to a friend's house when he noticed he was being followed. Police said he ran to the porch of his friend's home and while he

was waiting to be let in, the thief approached him, stuck a sharp object in his back and demanded money. The student then hit the thief on the head and ran toward nearby Wilbur Street.

The victim noticed a wrench in the assailant's hand as he ran off, police said.

The thief was described as in his mid-20s, 6 feet tall, with an average build and facial hair. He wore a white hooded sweat shirt, a tan zippered jacket with tan, brown and white stripes down the sleeves, blue polyester shorts and white sneakers.

Police do not think the robberies are related.

Anyone with information about either case is asked to contact Detective Michael Watson at 366-7110, ext. 133, or e-mail michael.watson@-cj.state.de.us. Anonymous tips can be sent to Crime Stoppers at (800) TIP-3333.

N.J. Man Says His Life Ruined By Link To Prostitutes' Slayings (WILNJ/AP)

By Wayne Parry, Associated Press

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP, N.J. -- "We know you did it."

That's what investigators told Terry Oleson, convinced he was the person who killed four prostitutes and left them face-down in a drainage ditch just outside Atlantic City.

Three years and three DNA samples later, Oleson hasn't been charged. Neither has anyone else in the case, which illuminated the seedy side of the nation's second-largest gambling market.

Friday is the third anniversary of the discovery of the bodies. As families of the victims grieve, Oleson also struggles. He hears whispers, gets strange looks and recently learned of the suspicion from the parents whose children play at his sister's house.

"It's ruined my life," the 37-year-old Salem County handyman said this week. "It's definitely there. I get people looking at me all the time: 'Oh, that's the guy from TV!'

"They didn't charge anybody, but they sure the hell made it look like I was the one," he said.

Oleson denies having anything to do with the killings of Barbara Breidor, Molly Jean Dilts, Kim Raffo and Tracy Ann Roberts, a former resident of Delaware, and said he hopes the killer will be caught.

Prosecutors never publicly labeled Oleson a suspect in the case, but investigators did question him extensively shortly after the bodies were found on Nov. 20, 2006, following a number of troubling leads.

He had been staying in the Golden Key Motel in Egg Harbor Township just before the bodies were discovered behind it. Authorities later discovered a network of hidden cameras in his Alloway Township home, and he admitted using them to secretly record his then-girlfriend's 15-year-old daughter in various states of undress.

After seven hours of questioning that began innocuously enough, Oleson said the tone abruptly changed. He says one of them told him, "We know you did it."

"I thought, 'Man, you guys are really friggin' stupid,"' Oleson said.

He was arrested four days later on an invasion-of-privacy charge, and came home to find that authorities had ransacked his house looking for evidence.

It didn't help that an acknowledged prostitute told police -- and any reporter who would listen -- that Oleson confessed to her that he had killed several women. She later recanted at a news conference and apologized to him.

A judge in the videotaping case commented that bail should be high, noting that "a suspect or person of interest in four homicides" is a flight risk. The same judge months later said in court that those circumstances no longer existed.

Oleson served six months in jail for the videotaping and apologized to the victim.

Before he was sentenced, Oleson gave authorities three DNA samples, hoping it would prove his innocence in the prostitute deaths case.

"The very first time I met this guy at the jail, he offered to take a lie-detector test, and give a DNA sample," said his attorney, James Leonard Jr. "I thought, 'Either this guy is the dumbest serial killer in history, or he's totally innocent.' I have no doubt it's the latter."

Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel told the Associated Press last year that DNA evidence can degrade to the point of being unusable after being in the water for a prolonged period. The victims had all been in the water for several days or more before being discovered.

Housel said in a statement Wednesday that his office is still actively pursuing the case, and has recently assigned more investigators to look into the killings.

He would not answer specific questions about Oleson or any other aspect of the case.

Hugh Auslander, Raffo's husband, said he has not heard anything about the case from authorities in the past year.

"I don't think they have anything at all," he said. "This has caused nothing but misery for me, so I'm trying to just move on with my life at this point."

Auslander said he's not sure what to make of Oleson and doesn't know whether to suspect him any longer.

"After Terry Oleson, everything just fell apart," he said.

Relatives of the other three victims did not respond to interview requests.

Years-old documentaries on the case are still shown on cable TV, and Oleson says they still cause him problems.

His next-door neighbor works with his sister, and their children play together in each other's houses.

"Three weeks ago, that thing was back on TV, and the next day the kid comes over and says, 'Mom says the door has to be open while I'm over here playing,' " Oleson said. "The kid still has to check in every half-hour now."

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL EDITORIALS

China's Clear, Tough Message: Clean Up Your Financial Mess (WILNJ)

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Americans should take a closer look at what Chinese leaders signaled to President Barack Obama on his trip to Asia this week. In some friendly (and some not-so-friendly) ways, the United States was told to get its financial house in order. Despite the talk of friendship, the Chinese were letting the United States know they do not approve of our current economic policy.

We have to realize that the United States is at an enormous disadvantage when it comes to China. China is America's largest creditor. As one economist put it, "never before has the United States relied so heavily on another country's government for financing."

China holds about $1.5 trillion in U.S. debt. That's up from less than $100 billion at the beginning of 2001. Holding that much debt makes the Chinese worry about the debt's value and about the U.S. system as a whole. China has changed from buying long-term Treasury notes to short-term notes. That is seen as a sign that the Chinese fear U.S. inflation, a development that would help America pay its bills in inflated dollars.

In addition, China's financial officials are beginning to lecture Americans about the fall of the dollar and the rising deficit. China's chief banking regulator criticized the United States for its low interest rates, because the continued borrowing could drive down the debt's value, leading to more strain on trade. The Chinese have even used the president's trip to question the United States' ability to pay for its health care reform.

President Obama urged the Chinese government to allow the yuan to rise, a move that would help the U.S. debt. America and other countries believe the Chinese are manipulating their currency, holding down its buying power. But the Chinese, because they now can, ignored the president.

We can expect worse in the future until we clean up our financial mess.

Such Galling Waste Requires Vigilance In Tracking Spending (WILNJ)

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

At first read, it seems like such a paltry figure. In all, about 5 percent of federal spending this fiscal year was improper.

But percentages fail to depict the true cost of waste: The federal government spent more than $98 billion improperly, much of it on questionable claims for tax credits and Medicare benefits. Even in non-recessionary times, that picture is absolutely intolerable. More unacceptable is the $26 billion increase in improper payments the previous year.

Unfortunately, government waste has become a normal expenditure of the federal budget. The hair wringing, which heightens during election season, has done little to curb this disrespect of the taxpayer's trust.

Sen. Tom Carper thinks the numbers released Tuesday may be just the tip of the iceberg, because they are based on estimates for several programs, such as Medicare's prescription drug plan. He's right -- most of private industry would never tolerate such losses, with or without deficits. Nor should we.

Next week President Barack Obama plans to sign an executive order to eliminate the squandering, fraud and waste in government spending.

Federal agencies will have to maintain a Web site that tracks improper payments, error rates and outstanding payments. Directors of agencies who don't meet targets to reduce the error rates for two years in a row will have to begin reporting to the Office of Management and Budget. Penalties on government contractors who get payments they haven't earned will be used as incentives to get the money returned.

Here's hoping this new level of fiscal transparency meets a better end than similar promises by this administration to provide a government that is opened and accountable to taxpayers.

BIDEN IN THE NEWS

Senate Health Plan Seeks To Add Coverage To 31 Million (NYT)

By Robert Pear And David M. Herszenhorn

New York Times, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON - Democratic leaders in the Senate unveiled their proposal on Wednesday for overhauling the health care system, outlining legislation that they said would cover most of the uninsured while reducing the federal budget deficit.

Mr. Reid walked into a meeting on the health care bill.

Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, said at an evening news conference that the legislation, which represents President Obama's signature domestic initiative and will be subject to lengthy and heated debate on the Senate floor, would impose new regulations on insurers, extend coverage to 31 million people who currently do not have any and add new benefits to Medicare.

And he said the bill, despite having a price tag of $849 billion over 10 years, would still reduce projected budget deficits by $127 billion over a decade because the costs would be more than offset by new taxes and reductions in government spending, particularly on Medicare.

Democrats expressed confidence that they would have the votes necessary to move forward when the legislation hits its first test in the Senate, probably on Saturday, in the form of a procedural hurdle that will require a united front from all 58 Democrats and the two independents aligned with them.

In one last touch on Wednesday, Mr. Reid and his aides finally named their 2,074-page bill: the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Mr. Reid wrote the legislation in the last several weeks, combining parts of two previous bills adopted by Senate committees. The House passed its version of the health care legislation earlier this month.

Calling the bill "impressive," the White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, said: "This legislation meets the president's objectives, provides protection from insurance companies, contains true cost controls and extends coverage to working families."

"We all know that this legislation is tremendously important," Mr. Reid said at the news conference. "Why? Because it saves lives, it saves money."

The measure includes a government-run insurance plan, or public option, with a provision allowing states to opt out.

Though broadly similar to the bill adopted by the House, Mr. Reid's bill differs in important ways.

Democrats said that it would increase the Medicare payroll tax on high-income people and would impose a new excise tax on high-cost "Cadillac" health plans offered by employers to their employees.

The Medicare payroll tax would rise to 1.95 percent from 1.45 percent for couples earning more than $250,000 a year, and individuals earning more than $200,000, Democrats said. The increase would raise $54 billion over 10 years.

The tax on so-called Cadillac plans, first proposed by the Senate Finance Committee, would apply to individual insurance policies costing more than $8,500 and family plans costing more than $23,000, raising $149 billion toward the cost of the bill. Mr. Reid's proposal scales back the tax on Cadillac plans proposed by the Finance Committee.

Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Democrat, said an important procedural vote to begin debate on the legislation would most likely take place on Saturday, before senators leave town for a weeklong Thanksgiving break.

Mr. Durbin also challenged the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, to post the Republican version of health care legislation on the Internet. Senate Republicans said they would fight the Democrats' bill at every turn, but they have also said they have no intention of offering a full alternative bill.

Republicans promised a fierce floor fight, including a raft of amendments.

"It's going to be a holy war," said Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Republican of Utah, who is one of his party's most respected voices on health policy but for the last several months has voiced nothing but fury over the Democrats' efforts.

Senate Democratic leaders spent much of Wednesday still trying frantically to nail down the final votes needed to begin debate on the legislation.

At least two potential Democratic holdouts, Senator Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana and Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska, signaled on Wednesday that they were open to supporting a motion to begin debate.

But Mr. Nelson emerged from the Democratic caucus meeting saying he still had not made up his mind. "I still don't have anything that I want to say because I have not had a chance to review the bill, and I only would be going on the basis of outline and that's not enough information," he said.

Senator Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas is the third Democrat who has not made a commitment to moving the bill ahead.

If the Democrats succeed in pulling together the needed votes, the Senate intends to devote most of December to a rollicking, unpredictable debate that could determine the fate of legislation that Mr. Obama has declared to be his top domestic priority.

Vice President Joseph R. **Biden** Jr. and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, both former senators, were on Capitol Hill on Wednesday, trying to help Mr. Reid round up votes.

Several Democratic senators emerged from the meeting saying that Mr. Reid had made substantial improvements in combining two versions of health care legislation, one passed by the health committee in July and another by the Finance Committee in October.

"He really did an exceptionally good job," said Senator Kent Conrad, Democrat of North Dakota, who is a lead author of the Finance Committee bill. Mr. Conrad, who is the chairman of the Budget Committee, noted that Mr. Reid's bill would reduce future federal deficits more than the House-passed bill or the earlier Senate measures.

"I would give Leader Reid very high marks," he said.

Mr. Reid's bill would not go as far as the House-passed bill in limiting insurance coverage for abortions. Democratic senators said that the bill seeks to extend current law by barring the use of federal money for abortions. But it would also require that at least one insurance plan that covers abortion and one that does not cover abortion be offered in every state.

In seeking to broadly expand health coverage, Mr. Reid's bill would require people to obtain health insurance. Senators said that the bill would impose a complicated set of penalties for people who fail to meet the requirement.

Mr. Reid's bill would create a voluntary federal program to provide long-term care insurance and cash benefits to people with severe disabilities. The program, known as Community Living Assistance Services and Supports, would be financed with premiums.

The premiums would be set to cover the full cost of the benefits, which, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would average $75 a day. The House-passed bill includes similar provisions.

Carl Hulse contributed reporting.

Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (NYT/AP)

By The Associated Press

New York Times, November 19, 2009

Filed at 9:37 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Setting up a historic year-end health care debate, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled long-awaited legislation Wednesday night to extend coverage to all but 6 percent of eligible Americans and bar private industry from denying insurance because of pre-existing medical conditions.

The Democrat's $849 billion measure is designed to remake the nation's health care system, relying on cuts in future Medicare spending to cover costs -- as well as on higher payroll taxes for the well-to-do and a new levy on patients undergoing elective cosmetic surgery.

Aides said the mammoth, 2,074-page bill would reduce deficits by $127 billion over a decade and by as much as $650 billion in the 10 years that follow, citing as-yet-unreleased estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.

"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey," said Nevada Sen. Reid, less than two weeks after the House approved its version of a sweeping remake of the health care system-- and nearly 10 months after President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day summons to action.

Obama welcomed Reid's action, saying, "Today, thanks to the Senate's hard work, we're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems. I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible." There was no mention of Obama's longtime goal of signing legislation by year's end.

Republicans vowed a protracted struggle to block the legislation and deny the president a victory that would cap a tumultuous first year in office.

"This bill has been behind closed doors for weeks," said Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader. "Now, it's America's turn, and this will not be a short debate. Higher premiums, tax increases and Medicare cuts to pay for more government. The American people know that is not reform."

An early showdown on the Senate floor is expected by week's end.

Reid's Senate measure would require most Americans to carry health insurance and would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to help those at lower incomes afford it. It also would mandate that large companies to provide coverage to their workers.

Beginning in 2014, it would set up new insurance marketplaces -- called exchanges -- primarily for those who now have a hard time getting or keeping coverage. Consumers would have the choice of purchasing government sold insurance, an attempt to hold down prices charged by private insurers.

After weeks of secretive drafting, Reid outlined the legislation to rank-and-file Democratic senators at a closed-door meeting. "Everyone was positive," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.

That didn't mean there weren't problems -- far from it. At his news conference, Reid pointedly refrained from saying he had the 60 votes necessary to propel the bill over its first hurdle.

Reid met privately earlier in the day with Sens. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, moderate Democrats who have expressed concerns about the measure.

Nelson later issued a statement strongly suggesting he would vote with fellow Democrats on an initial showdown expected within days. Aides have said privately that Reid decided to retain an existing antitrust exemption for the insurance industry as a way of satisfying the Nebraskan's concerns.

Landrieu said, "I'm not going to be for anything that doesn't drive down costs over time."

Lincoln, the only one of the three who faces re-election next year, told reporters, "We'll wait and see."

With the support of two independents, Democrats have 60 seats, the precise number needed to choke off any delaying tactics by the 40 Republicans who appear united in opposition to the bill in its current form.

In general, Reid proposed an outline that is similar to the House-passed bill, but there were important differences.

He called for an increase of a half percentage point in the Medicare payroll tax for individuals with income over $200,000 a year, $250,000 for couples.

He also included a tax on high-value insurance policies, meant to curb the appetite for expensive care.

The House bill contains neither of those two provisions, relying on an income tax surcharge on the wealthy to finance an expansion of coverage.

Reid's measure also calls for hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in future Medicare spending, an attempt to satisfy Obama's call to curtail the growth of health care spending that is fiercely opposed by Republicans.

On another controversial issue, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., told reporters Reid had decided to require the side-by-side sale of insurance policies that cover abortion services and do not, an attempt to satisfy both sides. That is far less restrictive than a House-passed provision that left liberal Democrats angry.

Ahead lie weeks -- if not more -- of unpredictable maneuvering on the Senate floor, where Reid and his allies will seek to incorporate changes sought by Democrats and repel attempts by Republicans to defeat the legislation and inflict a significant political defeat on the president.

Reid released his legislation more than a week after the House approved its version of the health care bill on a near party-line vote of 220-215.

According to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, that House bill, with a price tag of about $1.2 trillion, would result in coverage for tens of millions of uninsured, and provide 96 percent of the eligible population with insurance.

Two Senate committees approved different versions earlier in the year, and while Reid has said he would produce a blend of the two proposals, in fact he had a virtual free hand to come up with a plan that could command the 60 votes needed to pass.

Anticipating a major struggle, the White House deputized Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to join Vice President Joe **Biden** in trying to clear the way for the bill's approval over the next several weeks.

Salazar, a former Colorado senator, is viewed as a bridge to moderate Democrats who are far outnumbered by liberals inside the Democratic caucus.

Daschle was Obama's first choice for secretary of health and human services, a position from which he was to try and oversee the administration's drive to enact health care legislation. He withdrew his nomination when it was disclosed he had not paid more than $120,000 in federal taxes over several years.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Erica Werner contributed to this report.

Senate Health Bill Is Unveiled (WSJ)

Reid Outlines $849 Billion Plan; Tradeoffs Include Stiffer Medicare Tax on High Incomes

By Greg Hitt And Janet Adamy

Wall Street Journal, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, propelling action on President Barack Obama's top domestic priority, unveiled Wednesday a ten-year $849 billion bill that would overhaul the nation's health-care system and extend insurance to 31 million Americans without coverage.

The 2,074-page legislation represents the Nevada Democrat's first attempt to build consensus among Senate Democratic liberals and centrists, as well as the two independents allied with the party.

One swing Democrat, Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, said he still has a range of concerns but suggested he might at least be willing to begin debate. "If you don't like the bill, then why would you block your own opportunity to amend it?" he said. Two other Democrats on the fence, Sen. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, remained noncommittal Wednesday evening.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget office estimated the bill would ensure that 94% of those living in the U.S., not counting unauthorized immigrants, have insurance coverage, several Senate Democratic aides said. CBO previously estimated about 83% of Americans now have insurance.

The Senate measure would reduce the federal budget deficit by $127 billion over the next decade, and by $650 billion over the second ten years of the program. It achieves that in part through a new Medicare payroll tax and a tax on high-value insurance plans.

The $849 billion price tag comes in below the $1.05 trillion cost of the health overhaul passed by the House this month, and the prospect of additional deficit reduction may raise chances fiscally conservative Democrats will back the package. But the figures aren't likely to win over Republicans, who say the bill adds costly new benefits for some Americans when the federal debt is reaching new heights.

Other hurdles to passage in the full Senate include fractures between liberal and conservative Democrats over a government-run insurance plan and disputes over how the bill should treat abortion.

"This is yet another trillion-dollar experiment, but it is not what Americans bargained for," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.).

Among other things, the Senate legislation would create a new government-run health insurance plan to compete with private insurers. States would be allowed the option of not participating, and the plan would negotiate payment rates directly with health-care providers, rather than tying payments to Medicare's low rates. Those were concessions to centrists worried about government's footprint in the private sector.

The bill would also create government subsidies to help individuals and families comply with a mandate to buy insurance, and would sharply expand Medicaid, the federal-state health insurance program for the poor.

Journal Community

discuss

" OK, Mr. Reid. And the tooth fairy is going to leave a million dollars under my pillow tonight. " -Bruce D. Gulick

Mr. Obama said the legislation would help fix the problems of rising insurance premiums, increasing medical costs and the instability felt by those who lack insurance. "We're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems," he said.

Mr. Reid huddled with Democrats for weeks to hammer out details of the bill, and his decision to move forward Wednesday sets the stage for a pivotal vote, perhaps Friday or Saturday, that will determine whether the Senate can formally open debate on the bill.

"Tonight represents the last leg of this journey we've been on for a while now," Mr. Reid said. He met Wednesday with Vice President Joe **Biden**, and many Democrats voiced hope the majority leader will be able to secure the votes needed to overcome Republican opposition and move to the debate.

"We're going to clear the hurdles," said Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic standard-bearer in 2004. But the outcome remains uncertain. "I'm not going to assume a single vote," said Illinois Sen. Richard Durbin, the Democratic whip.

The coming showdown looms as the first of several votes over the next month that will test Mr. Reid's ability to hold together liberals and centrists. Republicans contend Democrats are trying to rush action on the bill before the American public, already uneasy, turns completely against the White House-backed initiative.

On the floor, there could be at least a half-dozen points where Republicans-if they use every stalling tactic available-could force Mr. Reid to muster 60 votes to move the bill along, said congressional aides.

Mr. Reid decided to pare back a proposed tax on high-value insurance plans, bowing to liberal and union complaints that the measure would hit middle-class families. Under his proposal, the tax would fall on plans valued at more than $23,000 for couples, up from $21,000 in legislation written by the Senate Finance Committee. The tax was estimated to raise $149 billion over ten years, far less than was envisioned earlier this year.

To help make up for the lost revenue, Mr. Reid inserted a provision that would raise Medicare payroll taxes on couples with income of more than $250,000 a year. For those families, the levy would be raised to 1.95%, up from 1.45%. Overall, the proposal would bring in $54 billion over ten years. Mr. Reid is also proposing a new tax on elective cosmetic surgery, generating $5 billion.

Both the House and Senate bills make hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in spending on Medicare. But the two chambers differ on how to raise revenue. The House legislation relies largely on an income surtax on the wealthy. The Senate bill would raise money across a range of health care sources.

Insurers and drug companies, for example, would be hit with tens of billions in new fees. So would medical device makers, though the proposed levy on device makers was lowered to $20 billion, down about half from the Senate Finance Committee bill.

Still to be fought out on the Senate floor is the issue of abortion.

The Senate bill provides wider insurance coverage for abortion than the House legislation. Among other things, the Senate's proposal would allow women who receive government subsidies to buy insurance to enroll in a plan that covers abortion, while the House bill would bar that. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R., Utah) said he wanted to force the Senate to vote on whether to adopt the House limits. "We'll have a major debate," he said.

Write to Greg Hitt at greg.hitt@wsj.com and Janet Adamy at janet.adamy@wsj.com

Reid Bill Will Cost $849 Billion (POL)

By Carrie Budoff Brown And Manu Raju

Politico, November 19, 2009

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid scrambled Wednesday to pull together 60 votes for his health reform bill - and his effort got a boost from congressional scorekeepers, who said his plan would cost $849 billion over 10 years, comfortably below the president's $900 billion limit.

The Congressional Budget Office also gave Reid some good news on the deficit - saying his plan would reduce the deficit by $127 billion in deficit reduction in the first 10 years and $650 billion in the second decade. It would cover 94 percent of all Americans.

Reid was briefing the Democratic caucus on details of his bill at 5 p.m. and it's expected to include a public option, with a chance for states to opt-out of coverage; a mandate requiring individuals to own insurance; and subsidies to help low- and middle-income Americans buy coverage.

Now Reid must hope moderate Democrats who hold the key to reform will agree to go ahead with a key test vote on the bill as early as Saturday, and Reid spent the day Wednesday wooing these fence-sitters.

But he got some positive soundings from centrist Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson, who put out a news release to remind voters that a vote to go ahead with debate on the bill Saturday doesn't equate to a vote in support of the bill. It seemed an indication that Nelson was willing to give Reid his vote on the motion to start debate.

Getting those 60 votes on what amounts to a procedural vote, however, has proven challenging for Reid, with two other key moderates, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, still not on record committing to vote for proceeding to debate.

At around 2:15 p.m., the three moderate Democratic holdouts - Nelson, Landrieu and Lincoln - entered Reid's office for a briefing.

"He is walking through the particulars with them," said Reid's spokesman, Jim Manley. "We need 60 votes to get this bill to the floor."

Vice President **Biden** held court for more than three hours in a room off the Senate floor. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle were also dispatched to the Capitol by President Barack Obama to lobby senators.

As expected, moderates were the focal point. Salazar ate lunch with Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) in the Senate dining room. Lincoln (D-Ark.) hustled into the Senate reception room for a sitdown with **Biden**, but she emerged without making any public commitments.

"We're still counting. Harry is still counting and working," Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).

Adding to the uncertainty Wednesday was the absence of Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who flew back to Montana to deal with a family emergency. With no margin for error, Reid needs Baucus present for the first vote.

Durbin said he was hopeful Baucus would return for the vote.

Reid said Tuesday that he is "cautiously optimistic" he can secure the 60 votes he needs to move forward on the bill by this weekend. Reid's bill is expected to include a national government insurance plan with a provision for states to opt out. Reid is also expected to adjust a 40 percent excise tax on high-value insurance plans by raising the threshold at which insurers would pay the fee. He's expected to make up for that lost revenue by proposing an expansion of the Medicare payroll tax.

Reid Plan Ups Pressure On Moderates (POL)

By Carrie Budoff Brown

Politico, November 19, 2009

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled his $849 billion health reform bill Wednesday to broad support from fellow Democrats - and the move quickly turned up the pressure on the last few wavering moderates to support the plan, which includes a sizable chunk of deficit cutting.

Reid's plan would expand coverage to 94 percent of Americans through a government-run health insurance option - allowing states to opt out - and other features, all while reducing future federal deficits by $127 billion over the next 10 years, according to Senate aides briefed by the Congressional Budget Office.

"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey" to bring health reform to the nation, Reid said in announcing the bill.

But Reid's plan contains considerable differences from House legislation passed earlier this month - with a more limited public option and different ways to pay for the bill. Reid included an excise tax on insurers who offer "Cadillac" health plans, not the "millionaire's tax" that's in the House bill.

And one of the biggest differences between the bills - on language restricting federal funding for abortion - could prove problematic for Reid. His bill doesn't include as many limits as the House bill and already is drawing fire from anti-abortion activists.

Democrats on Wednesday were clearly hoping that the deficit figures - the biggest deficit reduction of any health bill to date, Reid's office noted - would knock down one of the last remaining obstacles to winning the votes of key centrists, at least to go ahead with debate on the bill as early as this weekend. Reid's office said the bill could reduce the deficit by $650 billion in its second 10 years.

And, in fact, the strategy seemed to be working. Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson and Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu both sounded more positive about voting to allow debate to proceed.

Nelson told reporters he still had problems with the public option plan - he prefers a plan that would allow states to opt in instead - but signaled he'd wage that fight on the floor. He also made clear the vote to allow debate wouldn't be the final fight on the bill.

"There will be opportunities to amend the legislation, and if it is amended to the satisfaction of several people, then it will have enough votes to pass on the back end," Nelson said. "If not, it won't. That is the risk."

Other centrists sounded positive toward the bill. "If the bottom line is what it appears to be, that's an encouraging thing. ... But you've got to trust but verify," said Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), who said he would vote to allow debate.

One holdout appeared to be Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, who faces a tough reelection fight next fall. On her way in to the briefing with Reid, Lincoln was asked how she will vote on the motion to proceed: "We'll wait and see," she said.

Reid's hopes of calling a vote to proceed with debate as early as Friday seemed to fade, but a Saturday vote remained a possibility. But he has no margin for error, needing all 58 Democrats and two independents to block any move toward a filibuster and bring the bill to the floor.

And over the course of Wednesday, the announcement of the plan emerged as a key test of his leadership and vote-corralling abilities - with President Barack Obama dispatching Vice President Joe **Biden** back to his old Senate haunts to help.

Adding to the uncertainty Wednesday was the absence of Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, who flew back to Montana to deal with a family emergency.

Beyond the moderates, Democrats praised Reid's effort to thread the needle with a bill that will keep costs lower than Obama's target of $900 billion, reins in deficit spending and still expands coverage to more than 31 million Americans. The reimbursement rates for the public plan will not be tied to Medicare, and co-ops will still be offered.

As for the $650 billion estimate, it grows out of a calculation by the CBO that the Senate Finance Committee bill would reduce the deficit by one-fourth to one-half percent of gross domestic product over its second 10 years. Finance Committee officials converted that to $650 billion to $1.3 trillion, and Reid's office believes his bill to be in the one-fourth range and maybe higher - leading to the claim of $650 billion.

The Senate bill pushes back implementation of major parts of reform to 2014 -- a shift from both the House and the Senate Finance Committee bill, which created 2013 effective dates.

This is bad news for lawmakers who will need to explain to constituents why the elements that have attracted the most attention -- the public plan, the Medicaid expansion and the insurance exchanges -- won't be available for four years. Some reforms would kick in earlier, Senate aides explained, but the big pieces would still be a ways off.

Reid sought to sidestep hot-button issues that could cause trouble for the bill. Illegal immigrants will not get health benefits under the bill, and it would restrict taxpayer funding of abortion - an issue that almost derailed the House bill.

Abortion rights supporters were quick to praise the language Reid included in the bill, which was an early warning sign that it doesn't go far enough for some in the anti-abortion community who led the effort to amend the House bill.

The National Right to Life Committee slammed the language as "unacceptable."

"Reid seeks to cover elective abortions in two big new federal health programs, but tries to conceal that unpopular reality with layers of contrived definitions and hollow bookkeeping requirements," NRLC Legislative Director Douglas Johnson said in a statement.

Other Democrats praised Reid's efforts.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass), who was concerned about the tax on Cadillac benefits, praised Reid for raising the limits to policies costing $23,000 for a family and $8,500 for an individual. "They moved, and I like the new numbers. It is closer to where I first began. ... I think we are going pass this legislation."

Kerry also praised Reid's efforts to reduce the tax on medical device manufacturers to $20 billion, down from $40 billion, over 10 years.

The Reid bill would increase the Medicare payroll tax on couples who earn more than $250,000 and individuals that earn $200,000 from 1.45 percent to 1.95 percent.

The bill levies a 5 percent tax on elective cosmetic surgery. The provision raises $5 billion and was needed to make the numbers work, a Democratic Senate aide said. The Finance Committee considered the tax but dismissed it, in part because it was a public relations battle that senators were not willing to wage.

The Senate bill includes a public insurance option that allows states to choose not to participate. In order to opt-out, states would have to pass a law, the aide said.

The Reid bill only slightly toughens the requirement that people carry insurance. It levies a $95 fine in 2014 and scales up to $750 by 2016. The Senate Finance bill had no penalty in the first year.

Critics worry that people will choose to pay the cheaper penalty rather than buying the more expensive insurance plans because the bill also requires insurers to offer coverage to people who are sick. That combination could lead to an older, sicker and more expensive risk pool.

In what can be viewed as an election-year sweetener for senior citizens, the coverage gap in the Medicare prescription drug program would shrink by $500 in 2010 only under the Senate bill. The Senate

aide described it as a "down-payment" that would move the Senate closer to the House bill, which eliminates the donut hole over the next decade.

Getting 60 votes on what amounts to a procedural vote has proved challenging for Reid. **Biden** held court for more than three hours in a room off the Senate floor. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle were also dispatched to the Capitol by Obama to lobby senators.

As expected, moderates were the focal point. Salazar ate lunch with Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) in the Senate dining room. Lincoln hustled into the Senate reception room for a sit-down with **Biden**, but she emerged without making any public commitments.

"We're still counting. Harry is still counting and working," said Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).

Manu Raju, Patrick O'Connor, Chris Frates and Jake Sherman contributed to this story.

Be a part of the daily political debate with PROJECT POLITICO powered by YouTube. Click here to submit your video now and be featured on POLITICO.com.

Senate's $849 Billion Health Bill Widens Coverage, Cuts Deficit (BLOOM)

By Laura Litvan And Nicole Gaouette

Bloomberg News, November 19, 2009

Nov. 18 (Bloomberg) -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid released an $849 billion health-care plan that calls for new government competition for private insurers, covers almost all Americans and raises Medicare taxes on the wealthiest people.

Reid's proposal, the most sweeping overhaul of the U.S. health system in four decades, cleared a major hurdle when the Congressional Budget Office said it would cut the federal budget deficit by $127 billion in the first decade. That met a standard set by President Barack Obama and allows Reid to seek a vote as early as Saturday to open the way for Senate debate.

The 2,074-page Senate bill would extend coverage to 94 percent of Americans or some 31 million people, lawmakers said. The House already passed its version on a vote of 220-215 on Nov. 7.

"This legislation is a tremendous step forward," Reid told reporters at the Capitol. "Tonight begins the last leg of this journey."

The measure is intended to both reduce the ranks of the uninsured and curb rising medical costs. Both the House and Senate versions require that Americans get health coverage or pay a penalty, set up online insurance-purchasing exchanges and offer government aid to help lower-income people.

The Senate legislation would reduce the deficit by $650 billion in the second decade, according to preliminary estimates from the nonpartisan CBO cited by lawmakers.

'Good Deal'

Reid is trying to jump-start legislation, which Obama has said he wants to sign into law this year. Reid has cast doubt on that goal after months of setbacks and signs the Republicans want to prolong the debate by using delaying tactics.

"We're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems," Obama said in a statement released by the White House. "I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible."

Reid included a so-called public option program to compete with private insurers such as Hartford, Connecticut-based Aetna Inc. even though it's opposed by all Senate Republicans and some Democrats. He's gambling he can get support to start debate on a bill that's likely to be rewritten by the full Senate.

While the House opted for an income surtax on the wealthiest Americans, much of the funding for the Senate bill will come from a tax on high-end, Cadillac insurance plans, said Senator Kent Conrad, a North Dakota Democrat.

New Taxes

The Cadillac tax would be placed on insurers that offer plans valued at $8,500 for individuals or $23,000 for families, Conrad told reporters. It would have higher thresholds for high- risk workers and people living in states with costlier premiums, Conrad said.

Reid did settle on a Medicare tax increase for some Americans, raising the rate to 1.95 percent from 1.45 percent for couples earning more than $250,000, Conrad said. He also plans a new commission to help set rates paid by Medicare, the government program for the elderly, Conrad said.

The Senate's requirement for employers is also different. Under Reid's bill, companies with 50 or more workers would be subject to penalties if they don't provide coverage and have workers who get taxpayer funded subsidies to buy policies.

'Class Act'

The Senate bill includes a federally run long-term care insurance plan dubbed the "Class Act" that would let workers pay premiums and then get a cash benefit later for adult day care or assisted living expenses, lawmakers said. It would also bar insurers from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions, and would expand Medicare prescription-drug coverage.

Reid, a Nevada Democrat, has been melding plans passed by the Senate health and finance committees and still faces splits in his party over issues including how to pay for the bill, whether to set up a public option, and how to ensure that federal funds aren't used for abortions.

One of the top Democrats involved in the overhaul effort, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, may be missing the next few days. Baucus flew back to his home state of Montana to be with his ailing mother.

"We'll get him back here when we need him," Reid said.

New York Senator Chuck Schumer, one of the Democratic leaders, told reporters "everything looks good" for an initial vote to start debate. At least three Democrats --Senators Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas -- had refused to pledge their votes for that step until they could review the bill's text.

'Not Enough'

The bill "is better in some ways than in other ways," Nelson said tonight. "Until I have a chance to go through it, a brief explanation is not enough" to make a conclusion, he said.

Reid met with the three senators this afternoon and got some help from Vice President Joe **Biden**, who went to Capitol Hill to lobby other senators on the bill. Former senators Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar who now serves as President Barack Obama's Interior Secretary, also met with lawmakers.

To win passage, Reid has to keep all 60 votes controlled by Democrats together. Besides Nelson, Landrieu and Lincoln, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman has been critical of the public option. Lieberman, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, said he would support the vote to start debate and work with lawmakers to strip out the government program.

Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, the only Republican to vote for a health-care plan in the committee phase, said she can't support a public option. She's pushing for a trigger to put a government plan in effect only if there is evidence that policies offered by private insurers are unaffordable.

Time for Debate

Senator Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican, today said it's doubtful any Republican will vote for Reid's plan. He also said Reid should allow enough time for debate.

"We're talking about one-sixth of the economy," Hatch said. "This should be a very deliberative process. And it should take more than a month and a half."

Reid has safeguards to keep federal dollars from funding abortion, though not the restrictions adopted in the House, lawmakers said. Abortion rights supporters have threatened to vote against a final bill if it contains the House language and have been working to keep it out of the Senate version.

If the Senate passes legislation, it would work with the House to come up with compromise legislation for a new round of votes in both chambers before a bill would go to Obama.

"We are now down to the week we have been waiting for," Massachusetts Senator John Kerry told reporters tonight. "This is not just a matter of months in the waiting, this has been decades in the waiting."

To contact the reporters on this story: Laura Litvan in Washington at llitvan@bloomberg.net; Nicole Gaouette in Washington at ngaouette@bloomberg.net

Reid Pushes Holdouts To Vote For Health Bill Debate (Update2) (BLOOM)

By Laura Litvan And Kristin Jensen

Bloomberg News, November 19, 2009

Nov. 18 (Bloomberg) -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid plans to give fellow Democrats details of his proposal to overhaul U.S. health care even as lawmakers raise concerns over issues from abortion to a government-run insurance program.

Reid will meet with Senate Democrats at 5 p.m. Washington time and deliver a summary, North Dakota Senator Kent Conrad said. The next step is the push to begin debate on the bill, which would require several procedural steps and corralling 60 votes to overcome efforts to block action.

"I feel cautiously optimistic that we can do that," Reid said yesterday.

To keep the 60 votes controlled by Democrats in line, Reid is enlisting the support of former senators including Vice President Joe **Biden**, who went to Capitol Hill today. Former Senators Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar, who now serves as President Barack Obama's interior secretary, also met with lawmakers.

The legislation, Obama's top domestic priority, is intended to cover tens of millions of uninsured Americans while curbing medical costs. The proposals for purchasing exchanges, subsidies and a requirement that all Americans have coverage would cost more than $800 billion over 10 years and mark the biggest changes to U.S. health care in more than four decades.

'Still Counting'

The House passed its version on a 220-215 vote on Nov. 7. Reid has been waiting for Congressional Budget Office analyses on various proposals drawn up by the Senate health and finance committees before unveiling his plan.

Senator Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat and chairman of the health committee, said the CBO found the cost of "coverage" in the legislation is less than $900 billion. He didn't elaborate. House leaders initially put the cost of their $1.05 trillion bill at $894 billion, a net figure that took into account new revenue such as penalties for not buying insurance.

Reid is "still counting" members and plans to hold a vote on the motion to proceed to debate before the Thanksgiving holiday recess planned for next week, said Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat. The Senate might be in session on both days of the coming weekend, Durbin said.

Baucus Leaves

One of the top Democrats involved in the health-care overhaul, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, may be missing the next few days. Baucus flew back to his home state of Montana to be with his ailing mother, a congressional aide said. The aide said it wouldn't affect the timing of the bill.

A Senate aide familiar with Reid's proposal said the plan will likely include the creation of a federally run long-term care insurance plan dubbed the "Class Act" by its original sponsors, the late Senator Edward Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, and former Senator Michael DeWine, an Ohio Republican.

Under the plan, participating employers would let workers pay premiums into the program, which would offer a cash benefit of between $50 and $75 per day that could be used to pay for adult day care or assisted living expenses. Workers would pay into the plan for five years before receiving benefits.

The idea has drawn critics, who say its success would depend on a growing roster of new premium contributors. Conrad, who is chairman of the budget committee, called the Class Act "a Ponzi scheme of the first order," in an Oct. 27 Washington Post article.

Letter From Economists

The White House weighed in on the legislation last night, releasing a letter sent by 23 economists that outlined four priorities the Senate bill should include.

The economists said the bill should impose an excise tax on high-cost insurance plans; not increase the deficit; set up an independent commission to make binding recommendations on Medicare cuts, and carry out "delivery-system reforms," which would reward health-care providers for "providing better care, not just more care."

Including those elements "will reduce long-term deficits, improve the quality of care, and put the nation on a firm fiscal footing," wrote the economists, who included Princeton University Professors Alan Blinder and Uwe Reinhardt and former Federal Reserve Vice Chairman Alice Rivlin.

While Democrats control 60 Senate votes, Reid can't yet count on them to clear the way for debate.

'Competition-Free Zone'

One Democrat, Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, said his support for proceeding is in doubt unless the government-run insurance program, or public option, is included in the plan.

"I'm not going to support a bill that's a competition- free zone," Wyden told reporters yesterday.

And at least three Democrats -- Senators Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas -- have refused to pledge their votes until they have seen the bill's text.

Reid met with the three senators this afternoon to go over the details of what's in the bill before he introduces it, said Reid spokesman Jim Manley. The first big test vote for the measure may come as early as Nov. 21, Manley said. That would be a vote to end the delaying tactics of opponents who want to bar the measure from getting to the floor for consideration.

One of the most pressing issues for Reid is the public option. Wyden and Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia insist the best way to reduce health costs is to set up the government program to compete with insurers like Hartford, Connecticut-based Aetna Inc.

Carper Compromise

Other Democrats are critical. Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, said he won't vote for a bill that includes the program, though he has said he will support a motion to start debate.

Delaware Senator Tom Carper is crafting a compromise for fellow Democrats that might be offered

as a replacement for the public option during floor debate. The "hammer approach" would require states where insurance plans don't meet affordability standards to offer an alternative, national plan run by a nonprofit, Carper told reporters yesterday.

To contact the reporters on this story: Kristin Jensen in Washington at kjensen@bloomberg.net; Laura Litvan in Washington at llitvan@bloomberg.net

Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (AP)

By David Espo, AP Special Correspondent

Associated Press, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Setting up a historic year-end health care debate, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled long-awaited legislation Wednesday night to extend coverage to all but 6 percent of eligible Americans and bar private industry from denying insurance because of pre-existing medical conditions.

The Democrat's $849 billion measure is designed to remake the nation's health care system, relying on cuts in future Medicare spending to cover costs - as well as on higher payroll taxes for the well-to-do and a new levy on patients undergoing elective cosmetic surgery.

Aides said the mammoth, 2,074-page bill would reduce deficits by $127 billion over a decade and by as much as $650 billion in the 10 years that follow, citing as-yet-unreleased estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.

"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey," said Nevada Sen. Reid, less than two weeks after the House approved its version of a sweeping remake of the health care system- and nearly 10 months after President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day summons to action.

Obama welcomed Reid's action, saying, "Today, thanks to the Senate's hard work, we're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems. I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible." There was no mention of Obama's longtime goal of signing legislation by year's end.

Republicans vowed a protracted struggle to block the legislation and deny the president a victory that would cap a tumultuous first year in office.

"This bill has been behind closed doors for weeks," said Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader. "Now, it's America's turn, and this will not be a short debate. Higher premiums, tax increases and Medicare cuts to pay for more government. The American people know that is not reform."

An early showdown on the Senate floor is expected by week's end.

Reid's Senate measure would require most Americans to carry health insurance and would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to help those at lower incomes afford it. Medium and large companies would not be required to offer coverage, but they would be forced to pay fees if the government ended up subsidizing their employees' insurance.

Beginning in 2014, the bill would set up new insurance marketplaces - called exchanges - primarily for those who now have a hard time getting or keeping coverage. Consumers would have the choice of purchasing government sold insurance, an attempt to hold down prices charged by private insurers.

After weeks of secretive drafting, Reid outlined the legislation to rank-and-file Democratic senators at a closed-door meeting. "Everyone was positive," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.

That didn't mean there weren't problems - far from it. At his news conference, Reid pointedly refrained from saying he had the 60 votes necessary to propel the bill over its first hurdle.

Reid met privately earlier in the day with Sens. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, moderate Democrats who have expressed concerns about the measure.

Nelson later issued a statement strongly suggesting he would vote with fellow Democrats on an initial showdown expected within days. Aides have said privately that Reid decided to retain an existing antitrust exemption for the insurance industry as a way of satisfying the Nebraskan's concerns.

Landrieu said, "I'm not going to be for anything that doesn't drive down costs over time."

Lincoln, the only one of the three who faces re-election next year, told reporters, "We'll wait and see."

With the support of two independents, Democrats have 60 seats, the precise number needed to choke off any delaying tactics by the 40 Republicans who appear united in opposition to the bill in its current form.

In general, Reid proposed an outline that is similar to the House-passed bill, but there were important differences.

He called for an increase of a half percentage point in the Medicare payroll tax for individuals with income over $200,000 a year, $250,000 for couples.

He also included a tax on high-value insurance policies, meant to curb the appetite for expensive care.

The House bill contains neither of those two provisions, relying on an income tax surcharge on the wealthy to finance an expansion of coverage.

Reid's measure also calls for hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in future Medicare spending, an attempt to satisfy Obama's call to curtail the growth of health care spending that is fiercely opposed by Republicans.

On another controversial issue, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., told reporters Reid had decided to require the side-by-side sale of insurance policies that cover abortion services and do not, an attempt to satisfy both sides. That is far less restrictive than a House-passed provision that left liberal Democrats angry.

Ahead lie weeks - if not more - of unpredictable maneuvering on the Senate floor, where Reid and his allies will seek to incorporate changes sought by Democrats and repel attempts by Republicans to defeat the legislation and inflict a significant political defeat on the president.

Reid released his legislation more than a week after the House approved its version of the health care bill on a near party-line vote of 220-215.

According to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, that House bill, with a price tag of about $1.2 trillion, would result in coverage for tens of millions of uninsured, and provide 96 percent of the eligible population with insurance.

Two Senate committees approved different versions earlier in the year, and while Reid has said he would produce a blend of the two proposals, in fact he had a virtual free hand to come up with a plan that could command the 60 votes needed to pass.

Anticipating a major struggle, the White House deputized Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to join Vice President Joe **Biden** in trying to clear the way for the bill's approval over the next several weeks.

Salazar, a former Colorado senator, is viewed as a bridge to moderate Democrats who are far outnumbered by liberals inside the Democratic caucus.

Daschle was Obama's first choice for secretary of health and human services, a position from which he was to try and oversee the administration's drive to enact health care legislation. He withdrew his nomination when it was disclosed he had not paid more than $120,000 in federal taxes over several years.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Erica Werner contributed to this report.

? 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Daschle Is Still Go-to Guy On Healthcare (HILL)

By Alexander Bolton

The Hill, November 19, 2009

Tom Daschle on Wednesday huddled with Vice President **Biden** and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to strategize on healthcare reform, nearly 10 months after his Cabinet nomination crashed and burned.

Reid (D-Nev.) invited Daschle to his office for a meeting with **Biden** as Democrats are scrambling to secure 60 votes to clear a procedural motion on healthcare reform.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who has strong friendships with Democratic centrists such as Sen. Mary Landrieu (La.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.), also attended the meeting.

The former Senate majority leader from South Dakota is unexpectedly at the heart of Washington's highest-level negotiations at a key moment in the movement to reform the nation's healthcare system.

When Daschle withdrew his name from consideration for secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services in February, it appeared that he would fade into the background. The withdrawal came after days of national headlines focusing on the ex-senator's unpaid taxes. Daschle at the time acknowledged he had become a "distraction."

Obama said he "screwed up" in handling Daschle's nomination: "Ultimately, I campaigned on changing Washington and bottom-up politics."

The president added, "And I don't want to send a message to the American people that there are two sets of standards -- one for powerful people and one for ordinary folks who are working every day and paying their taxes."

Daschle announced this week he will be leaving one lobbying firm, Alston & Bird, for another, DLA Piper. The ex-senator has repeatedly stressed he did not lobby for Alston & Bird and will not lobby for DLA Piper, but government watchdogs have noted both firms have many healthcare clients. Daschle's title at DLA Piper will be "senior policy adviser."

Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), who negotiated healthcare legislation with Reid over the last several weeks, told The Hill Wednesday that Daschle has been in frequent contact with members of the upper chamber.

Daschle declined through an assistant a request for an interview.

Daschle is the second major hire with Senate ties DLA Piper has made in recent months. The firm also picked up former Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.) in September.

Francis Burch, the global chairman of DLA Piper, is clearly pleased to have landed Daschle, who is admired by his former colleagues on Capitol Hill.

"Sen. Daschle is a senior statesman and is justifiably regarded as one of the wisest and most effective problem solvers in Washington as well as in the nation and the world," said Burch.

Reid Rolling Out Big Guns To Push Healthcare Bill To 60 Needed Votes (HILL)

By Alexander Bolton

The Hill, November 19, 2009

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has recruited an all-star team of former senators - Vice President Joe **Biden**, Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar - to push healthcare reform over the finish line.

Reid (D-Nev.) plotted strategy with the vice president, Interior Secretary Salazar and former Majority Leader Daschle (D-S.D.) on Wednesday, days ahead of a crucial vote to begin debate on the bill that needs every Democrat.

Reid's all-star team indicates that the administration and Democratic leadership are now using all the persuading power and arm-twisting prowess available to them to carry President Barack Obama's signature agenda item to a successful conclusion.

A handful of Democratic centrists are holding out on the procedural vote, wanting time to read the legislation.

Reid got good news Wednesday when the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reported the measure would spend $849 billion over 10 years to cover 31 million of the uninsured and reduce the federal budget deficit by $127 billion over that time. That's under Obama's spending limit of $900 billion, a concern of many in the middle

Democratic leaders shared the legislation with the conference on Wednesday and then planned to hold a news conference and make the bill public.

"There's not a lot of room for error here," said Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), among those centrists targeted. "I think the administration is pulling out all the stops.

A Democratic aide said **Biden** met with Reid Wednesday morning to offer use of his extensive legislative experience and many friendships in the senate.

"He showed up to say, 'What can I do to help?' " said the aide.

Biden declined to say which senators he chatted with Wednesday.

"I met with a lot of people, anybody who will talk to me," **Biden** said while leaving the Capitol Wednesday afternoon, almost five hours after he arrived.

Biden served 36 years in the Senate and has strong relationships with nearly the entire Democratic Conference.

Salazar, a Democratic senator from Colorado until he joined the administration this year, has close friendships with Landrieu and Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.).

Daschle, a three-term senator, has also served as a colleague with those centrists who are considered the least likely to vote for a healthcare reform bill that includes a government-run insurance program. That group includes Landrieu, Nelson, Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (Conn.), an Independent who caucuses with the Democrats

"Relationships mean a lot around here and Sen. **Biden** has them and Sen. Daschle has them and Salazar has them," said Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), a member of the Senate Finance Committee who helped craft that panel's healthcare bill.

Landrieu suspected Obama may have even asked the three to make the final sales pitch to those on the fence

"They know the senators well, they know the Senate well, they know our rules and the way this is going to have to be negotiated on the floor," said Landrieu, who was scheduled to meet with Salazar on Wednesday.

Landrieu, Nelson and Lincoln met with Reid Wednesday afternoon to discuss their concerns with the legislation.

Landrieu said she was inclined to vote against the motion to begin debate on the legislation but the meeting with Reid mollified some of her concerns.

"I'm in neutral right now," she said. "The meeting helped."

Nelson said his relationship with **Biden** has always been "very solid" and called Salazar "one of my very best friends in the Senate."

Salazar told The Hill: "I will help as needed" on healthcare reform.

"If needed, I'm available," said Salazar, adding he also spoke to lawmakers Wednesday about energy and climate change.

Lawmakers said that **Biden** has been active in healthcare negotiations over the past several weeks but they have not noticed much of a role for Salazar and Daschle. They expect all three ex-senators to become frequent visitors - in person and on the phone - in the coming weeks.

"**Biden** has already [played] a very constructive role as far as I'm concerned, reaching out to people, talking to people, he's come to my office and having me down there," Conrad added.

Conrad, however, said he was not aware of Daschle or Salazar playing as active a role to date.

Biden and Daschle may be needed to convince liberals to agree to concessions made to centrists.

Republicans are united against the Democratic healthcare bill. Sen. Olympia Snowe (Maine), the only Senate Republican to support the Finance Committee bill, has indicated she will not back the motion to proceed. That means Reid needs every member of his conference to get the 60 votes to begin debate.

Nelson issued a statement Wednesday that a few Senate insiders interpreted as laying the groundwork for a yes vote.

Nelson defended his right to vote for the motion to begin debate, arguing that it did not equate to a vote for the healthcare reform bill.

"Let me say it again: It is a motion to start debate on a bill and to try to improve it," he said.

A senior Democratic aide said Reid will likely need two votes to overcome the Republican filibuster. One scenario would have a Saturday vote to end debate on the motion to proceed and then a Sunday vote on the motion to begin debate.

Jeffrey Young contributed to this article.

Senate Dems Take $849B Step Toward Healthcare Reform (HILL)

By Jeffrey Young

The Hill, November 19, 2009

Senate Democrats made a significant stride toward achieving President Barack Obama's goal of enacting a sweeping overhaul of the healthcare system with a bill that would spend $849 billion over 10 years to reduce the number of uninsured by 31 million people.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) introduced the bill Wednesday even as he continued to scramble to win over a handful of centrist Democrats who remain uncommitted. But Reid and other Democratic senators declared they had reached a pivotal moment in the debate.

"We've traveled really a long ways to where we are. Tonight begins the last leg of this journey we've been on now for some time," Reid said.

With the House having passed its version of healthcare reform earlier this month, Obama is closer than any president has ever been to signing into law a major healthcare reform bill.

"Today we passed another critical milestone in the health reform effort," Obama said in a statement.

Democrats invoked the memory of the late Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who called healthcare reform the cause of his life. "I intend to ensure that we do everything we can to fulfill Ted Kennedy's dream," said Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa).

But it will take more than inspiration to achieve success on an issue that has stymied presidents since Teddy Roosevelt.

The healthcare bill, and Reid's leadership of the effort, will face its biggest test yet Saturday, when the Senate will convene for a rare weekend session to hold a procedural motion on the legislation that stands as the first hurdle to advancing healthcare reform.

Even as Reid addressed the entire Senate Democratic caucus Wednesday evening and boasted about his bill, he could not say he had locked down the 60 votes he needs to ensure success on Saturday.

Centrist Democratic Sens. Mary Landrieu (La.), Blanche Lincoln (Ark.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.) continued to withhold promises to vote with Reid even after the trio sat down with the leader in his Capitol office. Reid received an assist Wednesday from Vice President **Biden**, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, a former senator from Colorado, and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), the man who would have been Obama's top healthcare adviser if he had not stepped aside amid controversy over unpaid taxes.

In a statement, Nelson hinted he might vote to advance the bill even if he did not support all of it but stopped short of declaring a position. "In reality, the meaning of the motion to proceed is very simple: It's a motion to commence debate and an opportunity to make changes," he said.

Over the course of more than a month, Reid worked through the challenge of melding separate healthcare reform bills passed by the HELP and Finance committees.

It was more than simply a legislative task. Though the two committee's bills, like the measure passed this month by the House, employ the same basic structure, they emerged from vastly different political contexts. The HELP Committee bill was considerably more liberal in its aims and more expensive in its costs compared to the Finance Committee.

Moreover, Reid had to settle vexing political questions that still threaten to divide his party. To the chagrin of some centrist Democrats, the bill includes a form of the public option prized by liberals and trouble still brewing on explosive issues such as abortion and immigration.

Republicans remain solidly opposed to the Democrats' bill, despite the majority's hope they may eventually win the support of Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine).

"While Americans have been clear about their opposition to thousand-page bills for new government programs, it's now abundantly clear that Democrats haven't been listening," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said. "This is yet another trillion-dollar experiment, but it is not what Americans bargained for."

The bill would bring the rate of legal U.S. residents younger than 65 with insurance to 94 percent by covering 31 million more people via health insurance exchange featuring private coverage and a new government-run public option plan and expanding Medicaid for the poor at a cost of $849 billion.

The health insurance exchanges in the states would take effect in 2014 and states would be permitted to opt out of the public option by passing a law to refuse it. People below 133 percent of the federal poverty level would be eligible for Medicaid. Those between 133 percent and 300 percent of poverty would receive subsidies and people between 133 percent and 400 percent of poverty would enjoy annual caps on premiums and out-of-pocket expenses as a percentage of income.

The bill also includes extensive new insurance regulations, including those that would limit companies' ability to deny coverage or care, cancel policies for the sick, vary premiums on age, health status, gender and other factors.

Individuals would be required to obtain coverage or face a penalty. Employers with more than 50 workers would have pay a fee if they do not offer affordable coverage and their employees receive federal subsidies to purchase insurance on the exchange.

In addition, the legislation would reduce to federal budget deficit by $127 billion over 10 years, according to Congressional Budget Office (CBO) figures touted by Democrats. Moreover, in the second 20 years after the bill would take effect, deficit-reduction could reach a staggering $650 billion.

To pay for their bill and achieve deficit reduction, Democrats cut Medicare spending on payments to medical providers by more than $400 billion, in part by establish new payments systems designed to promote efficiency.

The bill also would raise $371.9 billion in new taxes over 10 years, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation.

The bulk of those new revenues -- $149.1 billion -- would come from a 40 percent excise tax on the value of health insurance plans above $8,500 for individuals and $23,000 for families. Reid scaled back this tax to allay concerns about Democrats and labor unions that it would ensare too many middle-class people.

Reid added a new proposal to the bill that would increase the Medicare payroll tax for high-income earners by 0.5 percent to 1.95 percent of adjusted gross income. This new tax would raise $54 billion and affect individuals making more than $200,000 or families earning more than $250,000.

Pharmaceutical, health insurance and medical device companies would be tapped for a combined $101.9 billion in taxes. The medical device fee was more than halved from an earlier proposal to $19.3 billion to respond to complaints from Democratic Sens. John Kerry (Mass.), Evan Bayh (Ind.) and others.

In addition, the bill includes a plethora of provisions designed to improve the quality and delivery of healthcare services by means such as promoting the use of preventive medicine.

Landrieu Reax (POL)

By Live Pulse

Politico, November 19, 2009

Swing vote Sen. Mary Landrieu said she she'll decide tomorrow if she will vote to move the bill forward, after she's had a chance to read the bill. But the cost estimates being bandied about "sounds like numbers I was expecting to hear," she said.

"They're going to pull out all the stops and they're going to do everything they can to work as closely with us and again, Democrats, we're trying to stay as united as we can be. We know this is an important issue for the country and it's important we get it right. And we're moving in the right direction, for the most part. At least we're getting bills that are less than a trillion dollars, that are paid for, that are lowering the cost to the taxpayer and to businesses, so we're moving in the right direction but there's still some improvements that could be made and I'm hoping to see that on the floor."

By Jake Sherman and Patrick O'Connor

Read the rest of Landrieu's interview as captured by Sherman, the fastest transcriber this side of the Mississippi, after the jump.

Enormous cooperation to get a bill through this process. The Democrats have to try to remain united and reach out to republicans like Senator Snowe, potentially others, maybe Senator Collins as we go forward. But as you know I've been concerned about three basic things from the very beginning. One to make sure that this bill's main focus is driving down costs to small business, to families, to individuals and the government. Not just driving down costs for the government, but driving down costs for small businesses that are the key job creators that'll move us out of the recession we're in. If we can't give some relief to small business, then in my view it's almost not worth doing a bill. You know, if we cant provide a better path forward for businesses out there to be able to provide the kind of insurance at more reasonable costs, more choice more reasonable cost, it's almost worth not doing.

And then if we can't reduce the cost to the government, it's most certainly not worth doing because it's already 16 percent of our GDP. That's why until I see the CBO score and until I can review the bill, I'm just staying neutral.

And then the third piece is I understand proponents of a public option think it's a must have to keep the insurance industry honest. I want to reform the insurance industry, I do not want to eliminate them. And if we are not careful on this public option piece, you could eliminate private insurance. And that's not what we want to do. We want to reform it, we want to make sure we get rid of pre-existing conditions, if you get insurance you should keep it, we don't want to eliminate it and drive people into a government run, taxpayer subsidized public option. So those are the three things that I'm focused on. And if those issues are settled through the debate, then I'll be able to be supportive of a bill.

WHAT SHE TALKED ABOUT WITH INTERIOR SECRETARY KEN SALAZAR: We talked about the cap and trade, we talked about other options to get a carbon pricing outside the cap and trade method. We talked about off-shore oil and gas drilling, expanding domestic production, it was mostly an energy debate but we did also talk about health care. And as I said, I'm glad that the administration has asked Secretary Salazar and I think Vice President **Biden** to get more engaged. They are two members of the administration that obviously know a lot about the senate, they know all the senators, they know how the senate operates and they know we have, I mean sort of limited maneuvering room over here. We've gotta have all 60 of us and its hard to get 60 people to agree on some of these major issues. But we're making progress. But again, I'm neutral, I haven't made a final decision. I'm going to review the bill, look at the CBO score which we should be getting anytime now. And then decide to go forward. But again, if I do, if, to move for the debate, those are the three things I'll be generally looking for. And if they don't materialize I will not be supportive at the end.

ON INITIAL REPORTS OF CBO SCORE: That sounds like numbers I was expecting to hear.

They're going to pull out all the stops and they're going to do everything they can to work as closely with us and again, democrats, we're trying to stay as united as we can be. We know this is an important issue for the country and it's important we get it right. And we're moving in the right direction, for the most part. At least we're getting bills that are less than a trillion dollars, that are paid for, that are lowering the cost to the taxpayer and to businesses, so we're moving in the right direction but there's still some improvements that could be made and I'm hoping to see that on the floor.

As 2010 Looms, GOP Lays Its Bets On Opposing Health-care Reform (WP)

By Dan Balz

Washington Post, November 19, 2009

"All the anxiety's on the other side," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said with a smile earlier this week, as the Senate prepared for a historic floor debate over health care. "The hand-wringing, the agonizing, the how-do-I-explain this-to-my-constituents is on the other side."

On the day he spoke, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and White House officials were still putting out fires in their effort to round up the 60 votes necessary to clear the procedural hurdle allowing the Senate to go ahead with the debate. Reid would say only that he was "cautiously optimistic" that he would have the votes when he needed them.

McConnell went out of his way to draw a contrast with the other side. "I've got a cheerful, upbeat, optimistic team ready to go to battle over what most of my members, if not all of them, believe may well be the most important issue they will ever deal with in their time in Congress -- this effort to transform the American health care system into a European type system," he said. "So we are anxious for the debate and are going to give it our best shot. And I don't know how it's going to turn out."

President Obama and Democratic congressional leaders ultimately may prevail in their year-long effort to overhaul the nation's health care system. They have the numbers, if they can keep everyone on board once the bills have been amended on the floor and changed again in a conference committee. Still, McConnell and the Republicans now are betting that, no matter the outcome, their outright opposition to the plan advanced by the Democrats is both right on the merits and, as they look ahead to 2010, smart politics as well.

Republicans see two things that give them cause to believe their opposition will be rewarded, even if Obama eventually signs health care legislation later this year or early in 2010. The Republican base is overwhelming opposed to the measure being advanced by the Democrats. And there has been a bleeding off of support among independents for Obama's policies, particularly health care.

The latest Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 85 percent of Republicans oppose the health-care measure -- 73 percent of them strongly. That kind of energy produced the protests during the August recess, the Tea Party demonstrations this fall and the united front that Republican congressional leaders have adopted almost from the beginning of this debate.

Republicans also believe they are winning the battle for independents on health care. The Post-ABC News poll showed that only 45 percent support health care reform while 52 percent oppose it. Almost twice as many independents strongly oppose the measure as strongly support it. To Republican leaders, those numbers speak to potential anti-Democratic Party energy they hope to tap next year, even if the bill is enacted into law.

What White House and Democratic congressional leaders fear most now is a failure to reach the finish line. Failure to pass the bill would represent a huge disappointment to many of those who voted for Obama last year.

In the Post-ABC poll, 75 percent of Democrats support health care legislation, with 52 percent saying they strongly back the administration's efforts. A legislative defeat could significantly demoralize the Democratic base and lead to depressed turnout in next year's midterm elections. Which is a major reason why White House officials have preached that failure is not an option this time around.

White House officials read public opinion differently than do Republicans. They believe that Republicans in competitive races next year could pay a high price for opposing health care. They have seized on a new poll in Delaware that shows attorney general Beau **Biden** (the son of Vice President **Biden**) moving up dramatically against popular Republican Rep. Mike Castle, who has announced for the Senate and who voted against the health care in the House.

McConnell argued that Democrats have made a fateful decision to try to rally support with the argument that failure is not an option. "It's almost laughable," he said. "That's all they're left with. President Clinton was up here arguing that with the Senate Democrats about a week ago. And the reasoning was there's no other argument they can make. They've got no poll data they can show them. And so how do they get them to take a bullet for the team? They make this incredulous argument that somehow they'd have been better off if they'd passed it in the fall of '94. I don't think anybody buys that."

Democrats scoff at that assertion, believing McConnell is being disingenuous. If Republicans believe Democrats would be better off politically if the health care bill fails, they ask, why have members of the GOP worked so hard to defeat it?

White House officials believe that, if a bill passes, the political fever surrounding the legislative debate will break. Their hope is that most Americans (especially those independents who are skeptical about the bill) will find the sky hasn't fallen and, beyond that, will come to appreciate some of the insurance reforms that would prevent companies from dropping people or denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions.

McConnell notes that Obama won't face the voters until 2012. But Democrats in Congress have to worry about next year. That puts their political interests potentially at odds with those of the president. Will those Democrats in swing districts or red states ultimately buy White House arguments that a "yes" vote will be the right vote back home?

McConnell is not prepared to predict the future. But he said he believes that, "in every measurable way," Republicans are better off today than they were a year ago, with candidates "coming out of our ears" who think the climate is right. He won't say so but he also seems to believe Republicans are poised for a very good year in 2010.

The Democrats have much at stake in the health care debate. But so too do the Republicans.

ABC: Stimulus Website. ABC World News (11/18, story 5, 2:55, Gibson) reported, “The Government Accountability Office today both praised and criticized the Obama Administration’s website, set up to track the number of jobs created or saved by the economic stimulus. The GAO says it’s a step toward accountability. But the head of the agency that oversees the stimulus program has written Congress that they can’t guarantee any of the jobs have actually been created. Jonathan Karl continues on this story tonight. Jon.” ABC (Karl) added, “Charlie, the government’s top watchdog says that the White House has made a solid first step towards transparency in stimulus spending but that those numbers of jobs saved and created have significant problems. More than 58,000 of the jobs the White House claims were created or retained by the stimulus come from projects where no money has been spent. Nearly 1 out of every 10 jobs claimed on the Administration’s Recovery.gov website. That’s according to a report by the Government Accountability Office. Republicans say the numbers don’t add up.” Rep. Darrell Issa, (R) Ranking Member, Oversight and Government Reform Committee: “The inaccuracy of the site also shows you just how inept the government is at getting the facts right and making them available to the public.” Karl: “The White House says the problems are minimal and fixable.” Ed DeSeve, senior adviser, Recovery Act Implementation: “I think the problems that we see out of 12 million data elements are probably less than 1%. They are errors that recipients made, by in large, in reporting that either they didn’t have time to correct or didn’t identify in time.” Karl: “But the chairman of the board that oversees the stimulus tells Congress in a letter obtained by ABC News, that he ‘can’t certify any of the jobs data’ now on the website, because the information has all been reported by the grant recipients themselves

and not independently verified. A lot of the errors are simply sloppy mistakes. In Virginia, Kevin Knight's company reported his roughly $700,000 stimulus project created ten jobs in the 36th congressional district. That district doesn't exist, but his project does, and so do the jobs. He blames the mistake on a computer glitch." Kevin Knight, president of Knight Solutions: "It actually appeared on the website where I was. It kind of popped up based on the address and zip code." Karl: "On 'The Daily Show' with Jon Stewart, Vice President **Biden** said the mistakes on Recovery.gov don't add up to much and that there's been no wasteful spending." Joe **Biden**, Vice President of the United States: "We've been in business seven, eight months. But one thing you haven't seen is that old thing about the dog that hadn't barked. You haven't seen these big wasteful - no one's come up with anything we would have gone out there and spent $2 million on something that didn't exist." Karl: "The Vice President's spokesperson today told us that the stimulus is, quote, 'the most transparent and accountable government program in American history.' But that, Charlie, is not stopping the criticism here on Capitol Hill and demands for greater accuracy. As for those reports of fictional congressional districts, we are told that most of those were corrected today." Gibson: 'Jonathan Karl on Capitol Hill, thank you."

Number Of Stimulus Jobs Created Called Into Question (WSJ)

By Louise Radnofsky

Wall Street Journal, November 19, 2009

The Government Accountability Office, the congressional watchdog, will testify at a House oversight committee hearing Thursday that there are "significant issues to be addressed" in the accuracy of reports about the number of jobs credited to the federal stimulus program because of errors in forms filed by recipients of the money.

Separately, the agency tasked with overseeing the program announced Wednesday evening that it had corrected reports by recipients who appeared to be in non-existent congressional districts, after being asked to do so by the White House.

Discrepancies in the administration's count of jobs "created or saved" by the $787 billion stimulus program are causing headaches among Congressional Democrats who are trying to craft a new jobs program in the face of the highest unemployment rate in 26 years. Rep. David Obey (D., Wis.), who as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee will have a major role in any new jobs package, released a statement earlier this week calling inaccuracies in the stimulus recipient reports "outrageous."

The reports were used by the administration to claim that the plan had directly created or saved 640,329 jobs through September. But questions have been raised about the accuracy of the job counts and other details listed on the forms since their release by the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board on its website, recovery.gov, last month.

"Many entries merit further attention," acting comptroller general Gene Dodaro is expected to say, according to a draft of his testimony received by the Wall Street Journal.

Republicans are seizing on reports of inaccuracies to question the impact and accountability of the stimulus package.

Earl Devaney, chairman of the recovery board, will also be at the House oversight committee hearing. Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.), the ranking Republican on the panel, has called for recovery.gov to carry a disclaimer "warning visitors to the Web site that the information is not accurate and auditable."

Federal agencies were responsible for reviewing each report filed by a recipient of funds they were administering, and asking recipients to fix mistakes. The recovery board and White House officials also

carried out spot checks. Still, many errors appear to have gone undetected in the 156,614 reports released last month.

Recipients of stimulus money ranging from small business contractors and community colleges to large companies and state governor's offices struggled to accurately fill in the forms. The Wall Street Journal reported two weeks ago that errors by hundreds of recipients appeared to have inflated the total number of jobs attributed to the stimulus by at least 20,000.

Some recipients also failed to correctly enter the number of their congressional district, which has led to a flurry of accusations this week from Republicans that non-existent places were claiming to have created or saved jobs. The National Republican Congressional Committee is encouraging its candidates to send out press releases highlighting the mistakes, with statements that they should undermine confidence in the government's ability to handle healthcare.

Vice President Joe **Biden**, appearing on the comedy news program "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" Tuesday, played down the congressional district errors, joking about "bad civics classes."

"The jobs actually exist," he said.

On Wednesday evening the recovery board said that it had corrected the mistakes, explaining that it is allowed to do so when there is a `` significant risk that the public will be misled or confused.

Mr. **Biden**'s assistant for implementing the stimulus plan, Ed DeSeve, told the Wall Street Journal Wednesday that the White House was still confident that it could use the reports to correctly assess "the order of magnitude of the jobs numbers that are out there." "We think it is sufficiently accurate that it provides a good snapshot of where we are," said Mr. DeSeve.

The reports come at a tough time for House leaders, who have been floating a new spending program this week, and the White House, which has announced a jobs summit for early December in the wake of a new unemployment figure of 10.2%.

Public confidence in the existing stimulus plan also remains shaky. Only 7% of respondents in a CBS News poll released Tuesday thought that the stimulus package had created jobs. Some 46% thought it would create jobs in future, but that percentage was down from 52% in September.

Write to Louise Radnofsky at louise.radnofsky@dowjones.com

GAO Calls For Clearer Guidance From Administration For Reporting Use Of Stimulus Funds (WP)

By Ed O'Keefe, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, November 19, 2009

A government audit set for release Thursday urges the Obama administration to provide further guidance on how recipients of economic stimulus dollars should report jobs created with the funding.

The administration has struggled to clearly define how to report new or saved jobs since it's difficult to know what role the funding played. Further complicating efforts, state and local governments have used much of the money to pay for temporary, part-time or seasonal work, making it unclear when and how such jobs should be reported.

The Government Accountability Office found that almost 4,000 designated recipients who have not yet received stimulus funding reported creating or saving more than 58,000 jobs. Another 9,200 recipients reported no job creation, despite receiving a total of $965 million. The findings demonstrate the difficulty of counting jobs created by the stimulus.

Some recipients may have misstated job numbers. Others may have decided to retain workers or hire new ones, knowing that they will receive stimulus funding in the near future. Other recipients that

already spent money are reporting zero jobs created or saved because they are applying a narrow definition for what counts as a "saved" job or because they may not be taking into account the jobs created by a subcontractor receiving funds from the recipient.

Auditors will present their findings at a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing at which members of both parties are expected to grill administration officials about errors submitted by recipients in their quarterly reports. Government officials on Wednesday corrected or removed several incorrect Zip codes or congressional districts from the reports posted on Recovery.gov, the government's stimulus-tracking Web site.

The GAO audit also found that the government has failed to review about 25 percent of the quarterly reports submitted by stimulus recipients. Vice President **Biden** said earlier this week that the administration has yet to review every report. "The jobs actually exist," despite concerns about the validity of stimulus data, **Biden** said Tuesday on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."

Biden noted that there have been no reports of widespread misuse of stimulus funding, but the GAO is pursuing at least eight allegations of waste or abuse of stimulus funds from more than 100 reported. The audit agency has referred at least 33 other allegations to federal inspectors general, according to the report.

Job-counting Help Is Needed (WP)

GAO calls for clearer guidance for reporting use of stimulus funds

By Ed O'Keefe, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, November 19, 2009

A government audit set for release Thursday urges the Obama administration to provide further guidance on how recipients of economic stimulus dollars should report jobs created with the funding.

The administration has struggled to clearly define how to report new or saved jobs since it's difficult to know what role the funding played. Further complicating efforts, state and local governments have used much of the money to pay for temporary, part-time or seasonal work, making it unclear when and how such jobs should be reported.

The Government Accountability Office found that almost 4,000 designated recipients who have not yet received stimulus funding reported creating or saving more than 58,000 jobs. Another 9,200 recipients reported no job creation, despite receiving a total of $965 million. The findings demonstrate the difficulty of counting jobs created by the stimulus.

Some recipients may have misstated job numbers. Others may have decided to retain workers or hire new ones, knowing that they will receive stimulus funding in the near future. Other recipients that already spent money are reporting zero jobs created or saved because they are applying a narrow definition for what counts as a "saved" job or because they may not be taking into account the jobs created by a subcontractor receiving funds from the recipient.

Auditors will present their findings at a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing at which members of both parties are expected to grill administration officials about errors submitted by recipients in their quarterly reports. Government officials on Wednesday corrected or removed several incorrect Zip codes or congressional districts from the reports posted on Recovery.gov, the government's stimulus-tracking Web site.

The GAO audit also found that the government has failed to review about 25 percent of the quarterly reports submitted by stimulus recipients. Vice President **Biden** said earlier this week that the

administration has yet to review every report. "The jobs actually exist," despite concerns about the validity of stimulus data, **Biden** said Tuesday on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."

Biden noted that there have been no reports of widespread misuse of stimulus funding, but the GAO is pursuing at least eight allegations of waste or abuse of stimulus funds from more than 100 reported. The audit agency has referred at least 33 other allegations to federal inspectors general, according to the report.

Biden: Jobs Will Lag By 12 To 18 Months (NPR)

By Mark Memmott

NPR, November 19, 2009

For anyone who's out of work, "nothing matters until you have a job," Vice President Joe **Biden** conceded on last night's The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. And, unfortunately, "jobs are going to lag behind growth in this country by somewhere between 12 to 18 months," **Biden** added.

Biden Says Errors On Recovery.gov Will Be Fixed (CNN)

By Alexander Mooney

CNN, November 19, 2009

Vice President Joe **Biden** is downplaying news the government Web site Recovery.gov reported hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars spent on projects in congressional districts that in fact do not actually exist.

(CNN) - Vice President Joe **Biden** is downplaying news the government Web site Recovery.gov reported hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars spent on projects in congressional districts that in fact do not actually exist.

The districts don't exist, but the projects do, **Biden** said Tuesday night.

And the administration isn't to blame - the fault lies with the nation's educational system.

In an appearance on The Daily Show, **Biden** said the errors - first reported by ABC News - do not indicate unaccounted-for spending but are rather the result of 70 people who are the product of "bad civics classes."

"Every single solitary penny that got sent out there to a state, a construction company, a nonprofit had to be accounted for," **Biden** told host Jon Stewart. "And it all got put on Recovery.gov. What happened was, out of 130,000 people reporting in what they did with the money.70 did not know how to count."

"There was bad civics classes for those 70 people," **Biden** continued. "They had to fill out a form, what district are you in, and there was no such district."

Biden said checkers are now going through the reports to determine the actual districts where the money was spent.

Feds: False Congressional Districts Removed From Stimulus Site (CNN)

CNN, November 19, 2009

(CNN) -- The government Web site Recovery.gov is fixing errors that appeared to show hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars were spent in nonexistent congressional districts, the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board said Wednesday.

The errors, first reported by ABC News, were seen on Recovery.gov summary pages breaking down how many stimulus dollars were received in each state's congressional districts.

Arizona's page, for example, showed the state's 52nd, 15th and 86th congressional districts received hundreds of thousands of dollars in stimulus money, according to CNN affiliate KNXV. However, no such districts exist in Arizona, which has only eight congressional districts.

A report released Wednesday by the Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity said it found such errors on pages for all 50 states, four territories and Washington, D.C. More than $6.4 billion in stimulus funds was shown as being spent -- and more than 28,420 jobs saved or created -- in 440 false districts, it said.

The districts didn't exist, but the the money and jobs did, Obama administration officials have said. And the people who are to blame are recipients who apparently didn't know which congressional district they were in, the officials said.

"We report what the recipients submit to us. Some recipients clearly don't know what congressional district they live in, so they just throw in a number for their congressional district," Ed Pound, spokesman for the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, which operates Recovery.gov, said Monday.

In an appearance on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" on Tuesday night, Vice President Joe **Biden** said the errors didn't indicate unaccounted-for spending but rather were the result of people who had "bad civics classes."

"There was bad civics classes for those" who reported the data, **Biden** said. "They had to fill out a form, what district are you in, and there was no such district."

By Wednesday evening, incorrect districts appeared to have been removed from the states' summary pages. Arizona's page, for example, listed only the state's eight real districts and a category called "unassigned congressional district," which appeared to contain all the money that had been attached to the nonexistent congressional districts.

Arizona's "unassigned congressional district" row had $39,577,600, which is roughly the total that the Franklin Center said was previously linked to nonexistent districts.

Money that was reported as having been spent in a nonexistent district would be moved, in databases on the site, to the correct one in cases where the recipient reported a ZIP code, the RATB said Wednesday evening. Recipients who didn't submit a ZIP code will need to make corrections "during the next reporting period, which begins on January 1, 2010," the board said in a news release.

The errors raised the ire of U.S. Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wisconsin, and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. On Monday, he said the mistakes "are outrageous and the administration owes itself, the Congress and every American a commitment to work night and day to correct the ludicrous mistakes."

"Credibility counts in government, and stupid mistakes like this undermine it. We've got too many serious problems in this country to let that happen," Obey said.

CNN's Alexander Mooney, Kate Bolduan and Jason Hanna contributed to this story.

Oops. Feds Add 45 Congressmen (OMAHA)

By Tom Shaw

Omaha World-Herald, November 19, 2009

If you believe the federal government's stimulus report, Nebraska's population has jumped quite a bit.

According to the report, the state has 48 congressional districts. Actually, Nebraska only has three.

Several non-existent congressional districts also were included in the report for Iowa.

The errors are another example of the problems that have plagued the stimulus reports available on the federal Web site recovery.gov.

This week, Vice President Joe **Biden** ordered officials to fix errors in the reports.

The report for Nebraska lists several congressional districts that don't exist, such as 4, 14, 31, 44 and 48.

In some cases, the number listed likely refers to a state legislative district where the money was awarded. For example, the report lists $47,897 being awarded to the 43rd Congressional District. However, the money is for housing assistance in Ainsworth, which is in the 43rd Legislative District.

In eight cases, the wrong district is listed because information for projects from other states was incorrectly included in the stimulus report for Nebraska. Projects for Minnesota, North Carolina, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri and California are in the Nebraska report.

For example, $102,375 that went to the University of California-Santa Barbara ended up being listed in the stimulus report for Nebraska.

Of course, Nebraska may wish it had a 17th Congressional District. According to the report, 22.4 jobs were created or saved there.

Where Did That Stimulus Money Go? (MINNST)

By Bob Von Sternberg, Star Tribune

Minneapolis Star Tribune, November 19, 2009

Minnesota's 27th Congressional District has snared just over $3 million in federal stimulus money, five times as much as the 57th District has gotten.

One problem: Neither district exists -- except on Recovery.gov, the Obama administration's website that tracks the flow of stimulus cash.

Beyond Minnesota's eight actual congressional districts, which have gotten the lion's share of the money, the website lists 11 phantom districts that supposedly were awarded more than $7 million in grants.

An official at the stimulus' oversight body told ABC News, which first reported the errors, that nonexistent districts were listed because some people receiving federal funds "don't know what congressional district they live in, so they appear to be just throwing in any number" on forms submitted to the government.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty took aim at the errors Tuesday, tweeting: "Fed spending out of control -- it appears to go places that don't exist. MN has 8 cong districts; Recovery.gov says we have a 57th."

The errors weren't just in Minnesota. According to ABC, administration officials say they found 700 mistakenly credited phantom districts for amounts that totaled $6.4 billion, while supposedly creating or saving nearly 30,000 jobs.

Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wis., chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, wrote the $787 billion economic stimulus bill that Congress passed in February. He has been one of the recovery effort's most ardent supporters, but earlier this week blasted the errors.

"Credibility counts in government, and stupid mistakes like this undermine it," Obey said in a statement. "The inaccuracies on Recovery.gov that have come to light are outrageous, and the administration owes itself, the Congress and every American a commitment to work night and day to correct the ludicrous mistakes."

When Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., questioned administration officials about the mistakes, Earl Devaney, chairman of the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, replied in a letter that he can't completely vouch for the numbers.

"Your letter specifically asks if I am able to certify that the number of jobs reported as created/saved on Recovery.gov is accurate and auditable. No, I am not able to make this certification," Devaney wrote, in a letter provided to ABC News.

Appearing on "The Daily Show" Tuesday, Vice President Joe **Biden** offered this defense: "Look, the bottom line is that we do check [data sent to the federal government]. But what happens is the initial report comes in cold. We don't -- of the 130,000 reports that come in, as to what they did with the money, we're now going through it."

Staff writer Eric Roper and the Washington Post contributed to this report. Bob Von Sternberg . 612-673-7184

Fact-Checking Biden's Stimulus Fact-Check (ABC News)

ABC News Blogs, November 19, 2009

ABC News' Jonathan Karl reports: Last night on "The Daily Show," Vice President Joe **Biden** addressed the reports of stimulus jobs in non-existent Congressional districts -- but in the process, he made a mistake himself.

"Out of 140,000 people reporting in what they did with the money -- who they hired, how many jobs -- 70 didn't know how to count," **Biden** told Jon Stewart. "There were bad civics classes for 70 people and they put in districts -- what district are you in? No such district.

But later, **Biden** spokesman Jay Carney told ABC News that the vice President misspoke. In fact, 700 reports were listed with fictional congressional districts.

Carney said Administration has made an unprecedented amount information public about the stimulus program.

"Never before in history has a federal government program been this transparent and accountable. Never. Not even close."

Even so, 700 represents only about one-half of 1 percent of the stimulus projects listed. The overwhelming majority of the stimulus projects, the vice president's office points out, were listed with the correct congressional district. Meanwhile, the 700 mistakes are being corrected

Biden said that, in contrast with the Bush administration, there has been no wasteful spending under President Obama.

"We've been in business seven, eight months," **Biden** said. "You haven't seen wasteful spending. No one has said we spent $2 million on things that didn't exist."

No Gaffes, Few Laughs For Biden's Sitdown With Stewart (NBC DFW)

By Greg Wilson

NBC Dallas-Fort Worth, November 19, 2009

The only gaffe came on the way to his appearance on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," and even his harshest critics couldn't blame that one on Vice President Joe **Biden**.

The loose-lipped veep played it straight with the uential funnyman, defending the Obama Administration's efforts to pass health care reform and turn around the economy. Stewart, who is known for holding the feet of politicians to the fire with his smart-alec wit, mostly went along with **Biden**, poking fun at Republicans.

When **Biden** claimed that "we're getting resistance" from Congress on reforms, Stewart gasped sarcastically, "Stop it!"

The vice president touted his party's big tent, noting there are "moderates, liberals and conservatives" within the Democrat caucus, Stewart interjected, "And communists," a poke at Republican efforts to marginalize Dems.

Before the show, an NYPD car clearing a path for **Biden**'s motorcade T-boned a livery cab on the West Side of Manhattan. Two detectives and the livery driver were treated and released from a nearby hospital.

Mr. Obama's Task (NYT)

New York Times, November 19, 2009

There is no doubt that the prospects for success in Afghanistan are so bleak right now because former President George W. Bush failed for seven long years to invest the necessary troops, resources or attention to the war. But it is now President Obama's war, and the American people are waiting for him to explain his goals and his strategy.

Mr. Obama was right to conduct a sober, systematic review of his options. We all know what happens when a president sends tens of thousands of Americans to war based on flawed information, gut reactions and gauzy notions of success. But the political reality is that the longer Mr. Obama waits, the more indecisive he seems and the more constrained his options appear.

It has been more than eight months since Mr. Obama first announced his strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, warning Americans that, for them, the border between the two - where Taliban and Qaeda forces have found safe haven - is "the most dangerous place in the world." And it has been more than a month since his top general in Afghanistan asked for 40,000 more troops, warning that "failure to gain the initiative" over the next year could make it impossible to defeat the Taliban.

.

Americans are deeply anxious about the war. As the debate among his advisers has dragged on, and became increasingly public, many are asking whether the conflict is necessary or already a lost cause. Democratic leaders are among the loudest questioners.

It has become a clich? in Washington that there are only bad choices in Afghanistan. But it seems clear that this is not the time for a precipitous withdrawal, nor can the United States cling to the status quo while the Taliban gains ever more territory and more power. To move forward, Mr. Obama needs to explain the stakes for this country, the extent of the military commitment, the likely cost in lives and treasure and his definition of success. Mr. Bush failed to do all of that in Afghanistan and Iraq.

America's allies, many of whom are looking for a way out, also need to hear why their troops should continue to risk their lives. There is no chance in Afghanistan unless President Hamid Karzai separates himself from his corrupt associates and Pakistan's leaders step up their fight against the Taliban and other extremists.

Mr. Obama said on Wednesday that he would soon provide "a lot of clarity" on his Afghanistan strategy. These are some of the things the world needs to hear.

WHAT ARE THE STAKES? We agreed with the president in August when he described Afghanistan as a war of necessity. In a speech, he warned that if the Taliban insurgency were left unchecked it "will mean an even larger safe haven from which Al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is fundamental to the defense of our people."

Since then, some of his top advisers have raised doubts about the urgency and even the necessity of the war. The national security adviser, Gen. James Jones, said in October that there were "less than 100" Qaeda members operating in Afghanistan without bases or the "ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies." He said he didn't "foresee the return of the Taliban" and that the "next step in this is the sanctuaries" in Pakistan.

Vice President Joseph **Biden** has been even more insistent that the real front is across the border and that attacking extremists on both sides could be better accomplished with a lighter footprint in Afghanistan and Predator strikes and special operations raids. Other officials argue that the Taliban may have learned a lesson and might be open to a deal that barred Al Qaeda from its territory.

Mr. Obama needs to address these arguments - to say whether he still considers fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan to be central to American security and why. Does he still believe a Taliban victory in Afghanistan would mean a "larger safe haven" for Al Qaeda? And how does he see the relationship between the war in Afghanistan and efforts to hold off extremists in a nuclear-armed Pakistan? If the Taliban were to win in Afghanistan, would they be less or more likely to threaten Pakistan?

In March, Mr. Obama warned that, for Afghans, a "return to Taliban rule would condemn their country to brutal governance, international isolation, a paralyzed economy and the denial of basic human rights," especially to women and girls. We need to hear whether he still believes Americans have a duty to stop that.

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE WAR? In March, President Obama said his goal was to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future." He also argued that bullets and bombs would not be enough to drive the Taliban back. In Afghanistan, American forces and a surge of civilian advisers must "advance security, opportunity and justice" for the Afghan people, "not just in Kabul, but from the bottom up in the provinces."

Given that, no one in the White House should have been surprised when Mr. Obama's chosen commander, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, came back with an ambitious counterinsurgency plan, although his request for 40,000 more troops was clearly higher than Mr. Obama and his aides had wanted to hear.

If Mr. Obama no longer believes that a counterinsurgency is necessary or feasible, or if he wants to set less-ambitious goals (there has been talk of securing a smaller number of cities while speeding up training of the Afghan Army), then the American people need to hear why he changed his mind and how he intends to move forward.

Mr. Obama will also have to address his vice president's proposal. We share Mr. **Biden**'s anxiety that a larger American military presence might alienate more Afghans than it wins over. But we are also skeptical that a war against Al Qaeda can be fought from a distance. Drones and commandos still need bases, and Pakistan is not likely to provide them. They need "actionable" intelligence, which could dry up with fewer American troops on the Afghan side of the border.

ARE THERE CREDIBLE PARTNERS? There is almost no chance of holding off the Taliban (or plotting an eventual American withdrawal) without a minimally credible Afghan government and security forces.

The Taliban's medieval ideas and brutality are anathema to most Afghans. We see that in the courage of the Afghan families who defy the Taliban by sending their daughters to school. But the corruption of the Karzai government, and its failure to provide the most basic services and security, have caused many of its citizens to decide that they have no choice but to submit to the Taliban.

Even after his supporters were caught trying to steal the election, Mr. Karzai remains shamelessly, insultingly undaunted. Mr. Obama must make clear to both Mr. Karzai and the American people the sweeping changes required to build a credible Afghan government. If there are other, better partners, competent cabinet members or provincial officials, then Americans need to hear how Mr. Obama plans to empower them.

Mr. Obama should be candid about his administration's halting progress. In March, he pledged to send "agricultural specialists and educators, engineers and lawyers" across Afghanistan to relieve the burden on American troops and help the government "serve its people." There are disturbing reports that the situation on the ground is so dangerous that many of these advisers cannot leave Kabul. It was chilling to read in The Times last week that when the ambassador in Kabul asked for additional civilian staff, the State Department turned down some of his requests because of budget constraints and a decision to cap the number at 1,000.

There will never be enough American troops on the ground to defeat the Taliban or provide security for Afghans. Mr. Obama must explain his plans for building a minimally functional Afghan Army and police force. More trainers are needed, but as The Times reported earlier this month, even that is no guarantee of success. According to reviews by American officials, the effort has been hobbled by a high dropout rate for recruits, "a lack of competent and professional" Afghan leadership "at all levels," widespread illiteracy and corruption.

.

WHAT WILL IT COST? Mr. Bush cynically tried to cover up the heavy costs of the Iraq and Afghan wars and cooked the financial books with repeated "supplemental" financing requests. Mr. Obama has done far better and needs to continue to tell the truth.

The human cost will continue to rise if the number of forces rises. Mr. Obama should also acknowledge the cost in military readiness and the stress of repeated deployments on troops and their families. On the financial side, the Pentagon has already spent more than $150 billion on the war. While estimates are difficult, analysts say that for every 10,000 additional troops deployed, the annual cost will rise by at least another $10 billion. Americans need to hear how those costs will be met, even though the choices - raising taxes, cutting spending or more borrowing - are unappealing in a time of recession and high deficits.

IS THERE A WAY OUT? Finally, Mr. Obama promised on Wednesday to outline an "endgame." Given Afghanistan's desperate state, we are skeptical that he can lay out a firm timetable for withdrawal. But there are certainly benchmarks that he can offer. (Mr. Obama promised that in March, but the nation has yet to hear an accounting.)

There must be a way to measure progress or failure. Americans need to know the war will not go on forever.

The First Lady Thanks Trailblazing Service Women (ABC)

By Whitney Ksiazek

ABC News, November 19, 2009

"It's never been an easy path; I can only imagine how challenging it has been and continues to be. I know that some of you have faced skepticism, ridicule, some of you had to contend not just with the challenge of doing your jobs but with others perception that you weren't up to the job strictly because of your gender," the First Lady said as she thanked over 130 veterans that attended the East room tea at the White House.

Dr. Jill **Biden** gave the opening remarks, reaffirming the administration's commitment to raising awareness about the special circumstances women face in the military. She also took the opportunity to reiterate her and the first lady's' pledge to encourage all Americans to support the military through acts of service.

The First lady went off script to single out a few "firsts" that were in attendance, "along the way, you all broke one "brass ceiling" after another." She recognized the first female four star general, the first woman in the Navy to be promoted to Master Chief, the first woman in the Army Reserve to be promoted to the general officer rank, the first woman in the Army to receive the Expert Field Medical Badge and the first African American woman to serve as Chief Nurse at Walter Reed Hospital.

She accredited General Wilma Vaught for the event, who suggested to her that she should follow in the tradition of Eleanor Roosevelt and host a tea for service women earlier this year.

"We know that our servicemen and women's sacrifices are their families' sacrifices as well," the First Lady and Dr. Jill **Biden** said that they have learned over the course of the year that "service doesn't just end with the person wearing the uniform. "

Mrs. Obama reminded the distinguished guests that their legacy was more than just their own service, but that their legacy will be measured in the service of every woman who follows in the trails that they've blazed.

The First Lady announced that she was proud to sponsor a new Coast Guard cutter in honor of Coast Guard Commander Dorothy Stratton, who led the SPARS during World War II.

She summed up the spirit of the history of women in uniform in one phrase, "watch me."

"Watch me succeed. Watch me risk everything I have for the country I love. Watch me do my part to protect this nation and protect this union. Watch me."

Secretary Napolitano and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. James Cartwright also gave short remarks and thanked the attendees.

FLOTUS Fashion Watch: The First Lady wore a high-waisted periwinkle pencil skirt paired with a short sleeved patterned blouse with a purple bow.

Volunteers Assemble Care Packages For Female Troops (WJLA)

WJLA, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON - Dozens of helping hands spent hours assembling care packages for people they didn't even know.

The USO-sponsored Package Stuffing Party for Women attracted about 100 volunteers to the Rayburn House Office Building Wednesday. They filled care packages with mascara, razors, lipstick and hair bands for female soldiers serving overseas.

U.S. Marine Corps Major Justin Constantine was wounded in 2006 while serving in Iraq (web | news) . He knows how much these gifts from back home make a difference to those overseas.

"Getting something like this is going to help make their day a little easier," Maj. Constantine said. "It's fantastic and that's what this is all about. A lot of the women don't get female specific items in the care packages, so this is huge for them."

ABC 7 Talkback:

Click Here to Comment on this Story

This is the first time the USO has tailor made its care packages for women in the military.

Volunteer Nancy Fiscus served in the Navy. Her husband is on his second tour of duty in Iraq.

"When we do the other care packages they don't specifically go to a woman," Fiscus said. "There's not the smelly stuff, there's not the special stuff that we need as a woman."

Jill **Biden**, the wife of the Vice President Joe **Biden**, volunteered her time to pack care packages. Her stepson Beau served in Iraq.

"As a military mom I have seen first hand how acts of kindness and service like today's effort can help improve the life of a serviceman," Jill **Biden** said.

The volunteers assembled 2,000 care packages, which should begin arriving overseas in about three weeks.

Palin Hits The (book) Trail (POL)

By Ben Smith

Politico, November 19, 2009

If Sarah Palin were running for president, this is where she'd come: The outskirts of a second city in the conservative heartland of Western Michigan, where thousands gathered Wednesday to see her, shake her hand and have her sign their copies of "Going Rogue."

And if she were running for president, she'd be doing about what she did Wednesday, under the watchful eyes a half-dozen capable advance hands, veterans of the White House and the McCain campaign, who herded the press and the public into even lines. She had a VIP list for key local conservatives, shuttling them discreetly to the front of the line. She had a few talking points, tailored for the local area, to deliver after she stepped down with a big smile from her big bus, handing baby Trig off to an aide after her four-inch heels hit the sidewalk outside a shopping mall Barnes & Nobles, where she held her first book signing.

"They deserve more credit than they're getting for the level of early organization that they have," observed John Yob, a Grand Rapids political consultant who served for a time as political director of John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign.

The stop in Grand Rapids felt like a political campaign event, not a book tour. For a woman written off as a disorganized celebrity on a tour run by monomaniacal book publicists, Palin and her aides were clearly thinking politics.

Yob was ushered past the rope line with his father, Chuck, a former Republican National Committeeman and regional power broker. The elder Yob penned an open letter to Palin after McCain announced that he was abandoning Michigan, cheering her public dissent from the campaign strategy, telling her she'd "kicked Joe **Biden**'s butt in the debate," and inviting her to "come to Michigan immediately."

Also there were the minority leader of the Michigan House, Kevin Elsenheimer, and Joanne Voorhees, the conservative Kent County Republican Party chairwoman who was briefly in the news for abruptly cancelling an event for former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, on the grounds that hosting a moderate would be breaking with Republican "roots." Two local state Representatives, Bob Genetski and Dave Agema, both devout Christian conservatives, were also invited to meet Palin.

The logistics weren't perfect: The Kent County Republicans could be heard muttering that they'd been rushed past the former Alaska governor. But Chuck Yob said he was pleased after an advance man walked him and his son to the front of the line, and Palin reacted with pleased surprise to their presence.

"Oh my God, that's neat," she said.

Palin's roadshow travels in a campaign-style bus painted to match the cover of her book, with a giant picture of Palin and Facebook and Twitter logos. She emerged with a wave for the adoring crowd, which had begun massing 24 hours earlier, and a few words for the television cameras.

Her staff was made up of volunteers: Jason Recher, a campaign advance man whom she describes in glowing terms in her book, and John Roberts, a former White House staffer, who steered her through the media scrum after she handed off her son. Also on the bus was an aide to her Political Action Committee, former RNC Finance Director Tim Crawford.

Western Michigan - an "awesome area of this great land" - can be rescued "if we apply some good free enterprise principles in our federal government," she said in a brief interview with reporters, where she dismissed Newsweek's decision to put her on its cover in running shorts as "cheesy."

"I would never have posed for Newsweek in shorts," she said of the picture, which was taken for an article in Runner's World that ran last August.

Grand Rapids was where Palin first "'went rogue' trying to reach out during the campaign," she writes in "Going Rogue," and it's the beginning of a tour that will retrace many of the stops on the Republican primary in Palin's demonstration of how the contest might have looked if she'd had her way.

Palin, meanwhile, ends "Going Rogue" with a tribute to the state.

"I'm thinking when I get back, I'll bake the kids a cake. And I'll pull out a road map - I want to show Piper the way to Michigan," she writes in the final line of her book.

The state seemed to be returning her affection Wednesday, as locals began lining up Tuesday evening outside the bookstore. By 5:00 a.m. Wednesday, hours before her appearance, the store had already handed out more than 500 wristbands entitling their bearers to a place on line. Aides said that in all, over 1,000 people had their books signed, and hundreds more came for a glimpse.

"She's one of us. She doesn't seem like a Washington elite," said Denese Crouch, a homemaker who lives outside Grand Rapids, echoing the dominant theme in a canvass of the long line, which was the ease of identifying with Palin. "She seems to figure solutions to problems like I'd do with my own family," Crouch said.

Indeed, though the line was broadly Republican, Palin's persona and her outsider status seemed to trump any particular issues with most of her admirers.

"She stands for everything I believe. I wear a suit and nylons and pumps to work" while loving nature, said Kim VandeKoppel, who runs a printing business in Grand Rapids, and who also praised Palin's "Christian beliefs."

At the front of the line was Robin Case, 44, who'd driven the previous evening from Traverse City and who sat at the front of the line in sweatpants giving an endless series of interviews to local and national reporters. "What she represents is what I'm standing in line for," she said repeatedly. "She's like you and me -- someone who represents me when we're sitting around the table like other normal folks."

Case said she stopped working to take care of her in-laws, who suffer from dementia and were driven into poverty and onto Medicaid when "they got into that donut hole with prescriptions" she said, referring to a much-criticized provision of 2003 Republican legislation.

Her criticism, a reporter noted, sounded a bit like President Barack Obama's. What did she think of his health care plan?

The politicians currently debating health care "just want to line their pockets" she responded. "Sarah Palin's not like that."

The event also drew its share of more ideological conservatives. Bob Weinert, 56, a fencing salesman from Lansing, said he'd heard Rush Limbaugh say recently that Palin is "the most conservative candidate out there." She represents, he said, "limited government and traditional values," including "putting homos back in the closet."

"And putting Christmas in the stores," added his wife, Rexanna, who said she felt she could trust the "down-to-earth" Palin.

A few minutes later, a diffident young man wandered by with a handmade "Homos for Palin" t-shirt until he encountered a mall security guard.

"You've got to zip it up or leave," said the security guard and the young man, who said he was a college student but wouldn't give his name, complied.

Palin's tour will take her through the battleground states where, she writes, she felt the McCain campaign made her pull her punches. There are stops in Fort Wayne, Indiana and Fairfax, Virginia, Florida's The Villages, and the Missouri Ozarks.

Michigan, though, is a particular preoccupation of hers, despite its place as the ancestral state of the presumptive 2012 GOP front runner, Mitt Romney, whose father was governor.

Be a part of the daily political debate with PROJECT POLITICO powered by YouTube. Click here to submit your video now and be featured on POLITICO.com.

VICE PRESIDENTIAL *NEWS CLIPS*

PRODUCED FOR THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

TO: **THE VICE PRESIDENT AND STAFF**

DATE: **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2009 -- 6:15 AM EST**

TODAY'S EDITION

Wilmington News Journal Stories

Plouffe: Castle's 'Independent Profile' Will Be Challenged (WILNJ) 2
Prisons To Divide Health Contracts Into Parts (WILNJ) 2
Legislators Not Ready To Commit On Casinos (WILNJ) 4
Being First Lady (WILNJ) 5
Debate Heated On Proposed Apology For Slavery From State (WILNJ) 6
Town Urges Ban On Driver Texting (WILNJ) 7
Program To Restore Natural Habitat Shows Success (WILNJ) ... 8
Many Numbers To Reach Del. Government (WILNJ) 9
UD Community Pumped For Blood-drive Challenge (WILNJ) 12
New Learning Environment At Air Mobility Museum (WILNJ) 13
Working Together For Young Ones (WILNJ) 13
Doctors Reject New Screening Guidelines (WILNJ) 15
Thanksgiving Is All About The Turkey (WILNJ) 16
Autumn's Final Gifts (WILNJ) 18
Liquor Store Clerk Had 'No Choice' (WILNJ) 20
Child Pornographer Gets 30 Years (WILNJ) 21
Driver Alive After His Pickup Is Hit By Train (WILNJ) 22
Police Investigate Two Newark Heists (WILNJ) 22
N.J. Man Says His Life Ruined By Link To Prostitutes' Slayings (WILNJ/AP) 23

Wilmington News Journal Editorials

China's Clear, Tough Message: Clean Up Your Financial Mess (WILNJ) 24
Such Galling Waste Requires Vigilance In Tracking Spending (WILNJ) 25

Biden In The News

Senate Health Plan Seeks To Add Coverage To 31 Million (NYT) 26
Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (NYT/AP) .. 28
Senate Health Bill Is Unveiled (WSJ) 29
Reid Bill Will Cost $849 Billion (POL) 31
Reid Plan Ups Pressure On Moderates (POL) 32
Senate's $849 Billion Health Bill Widens Coverage, Cuts Deficit (BLOOM) 35
Reid Pushes Holdouts To Vote For Health Bill Debate (Update2) (BLOOM) 37
Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (AP) 39
Daschle Is Still Go-to Guy On Healthcare (HILL) 41
Reid Rolling Out Big Guns To Push Healthcare Bill To 60 Needed Votes (HILL) 41
Senate Dems Take $849B Step Toward Healthcare Reform (HILL) 43
Landrieu Reax (POL) 45
As 2010 Looms, GOP Lays Its Bets On Opposing Health-care Reform (WP) 46
ABC: Stimulus Website 48
Number Of Stimulus Jobs Created Called Into Question (WSJ) 49
GAO Calls For Clearer Guidance From Administration For Reporting Use Of Stimulus Funds (WP) 50
Job-counting Help Is Needed (WP) 51
Biden: Jobs Will Lag By 12 To 18 Months (NPR) 52
Biden Says Errors On Recovery.gov Will Be Fixed (CNN) 52
Feds: False Congressional Districts Removed From Stimulus Site (CNN) 52
Oops. Feds Add 45 Congressmen (OMAHA) 53
Where Did That Stimulus Money Go? (MINNST) 54
Fact-Checking Biden's Stimulus Fact-Check (ABC News) 55
No Gaffes, Few Laughs For Biden's Sitdown With Stewart (NBC DFW) 55
Mr. Obama's Task (NYT) 56
The First Lady Thanks Trailblazing Service Women (ABC) 58
Volunteers Assemble Care Packages For Female Troops (WJLA) 59
Palin Hits The (book) Trail (POL) 60

Online Version

Visit www.bulletinnews.com/vp for searchable archive, interactive story index, and links to complete stories where appropriate.

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES

Plouffe: Castle's 'Independent Profile' Will Be Challenged (WILNJ)

By Nicole Gaudiano, News Journal Washington Bureau

Wilmington News Journal, November 18, 2009

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama's campaign manager said Rep. Mike Castle's votes against health care reform and the economic stimulus package will hurt his bid for election to the U.S. Senate in 2010.

David Plouffe, a Delaware native, said he hasn't been following the race that closely. But he hit on themes voiced by other Democrats when asked on Tuesday how Democrats would mount a winning campaign against Castle.

"This was someone who had developed somewhat of an independent profile," said Plouffe, who is on tour with his new book chronicling the Obama campaign, "The Audacity to Win." "I think that's going to be challenged now given his recent behavior."

The Democratic National Committee began running a radio ad on WXCY in Wilmington this week, targeting Castle's vote against health care reform. Castle objected to the cost and various other elements of the bill.

The DNC also circulated poll results from the Susquehanna Polling & Research, showing Delaware Attorney General Beau **Biden** beating Castle by five points in a hypothetical race. **Biden** is expected to run for the remainder of his father Vice President Joe **Biden**'s term, but has not declared his candidacy.

"I don't buy that Mike Castle can't be beat," said Plouffe.

Though Plouffe will be helping the DNC and administration "broadly" on political issues, he said he will be doing very little political consulting next year.

Would he advise Beau **Biden** to jump into the race?

"It's rightly more of a personal decision," Plouffe said.

Plouffe said he and his former campaign rival Steve Schmidt will return occasionally to their shared alma mater, the University of Delaware, as they develop a center for political communication at the school. Schmidt served as campaign manager for Republican Presidential nominee, Sen. John McCain of Arizona.

"It's exciting," he said. "We disagree about many things, but we agree on the need to continue to produce young men and women who want to get involved in politics of both parties and this will be a good way to do it."

Prisons To Divide Health Contracts Into Parts (WILNJ)

By Esteban Parra, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Details on how the state will divide its inmate health-care contract -- which has been under federal scrutiny for three years -- were released Wednesday by the Department of Correction.

Rather than having a single health care provider, prison officials are breaking the contract into 10 smaller agreements focusing on specific services. The change comes a month after Corrections Commissioner Carl C. Danberg announced he was ending a contract next year with St. Louis-based Correction Medical Services (CMS), which has been criticized for providing inadequate health care despite being paid more than $130 million over three years.

"We expect this flexibility, and the increased competition it is expected to provide, will foster improved medical care and cost savings," Danberg said. "The Department spent significant time exploring alternative solutions to the way we contract for medical services. We believe this alternative will allow for large and small service providers to bid on the areas that fall within their specialization."

Delaware entered an agreement with the federal government to improve prison health care in 2006 following stories by The News Journal that uncovered problems and high inmate death rates, especially from AIDS and suicides. The 2005 series of stories also pointed to poor medical treatment for cancer, meningitis, hepatitis and other communicable diseases and bacterial infections.

Joshua W. Martin III, who leads a team appointed by the state and federal governments to monitor progress, issued a report in September saying it is unlikely the department will be in full compliance when the agreement expires next month.

If the state does not meet the deadline, the federal government can sue to take over the prisons or extend the agreement.

The new contract is posted on the department's Web site and the winning bidders could take over by July 1, 2010 -- the day after CMS' current contract ends. CMS also can bid on all or parts of the new contract.

Interested companies can bid on one or more of these services or they can bid to manage the entire health care program.

The DOC is seeking bidders for medical, nursing, mental health, dental, female health care and pharmacy services. It also is seeking to contract "specialty consultation," which includes examining the use of off-site specialists and negotiating contracts for providers to go onsite, as well as "utilization review services," whose responsibilities include monitoring integrated information concerning care.

Also on the list are substance abuse treatment and inpatient hospital services, which include critical care, inpatient case management and discharge planning.

The new contract also will have a "shared risk," with the DOC to payfor certain costs to prevent medical providers from limiting inmate care to maximize their profits.

Danberg has said he is not sure if the new contract format would reduce costs, adding that results he's seen across the country are mixed. While more companies competing for more bids would likely be financially better for the state in the short run, managing a larger number of vendors could become a problem as it increases other costs, such as hiring more people to oversee vendors.

Prison experts have given the new process mixed reviews.

Jeff Eiser, a former prison administrator in Ohio who is now a private consultant, said bidding out the prison medical contract in smaller parts would result in better care. But Dr. Robert Cohen, who was appointed by state and federal courts to monitor prisons in five states, said the best way for Delaware to save money and improve prisoner health care would be to reduce the number of inmates by about a third.

The Rev. Christopher Bullock, senior pastor of New Canaan Baptist Church and co-founder of the Delaware Coalition for Prison Reform and Justice, said he is glad to see the CMS contract ending, adding he hopes state officials reject any CMS bids based on the company's record.

In addition to lawmakers having a say in the selection process, Bullock said he would like to see the public have input too because it is paying for the services.

Though he is happy the CMS chapter is coming to an end, Bullock said he is concerned that too many venders might be difficult to manage.

"There's a lot of questions if it's going to be done that way," Bullock said. "You know, sometimes when you have too many cooks in the kitchen the meal doesn't come out right.

"But if you have one chef who is in charge, then the meal always comes out better. I hope we're not putting too many cooks in the kitchen."

Legislators Not Ready To Commit On Casinos (WILNJ)

By Ginger Gibson, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Even as more developers come forward with hopes -- and funding -- to build a casino in Wilmington, many lawmakers are reserving judgment on whether they will support an expansion of gambling.

Senate Minority Whip Liane Sorenson said she doesn't have enough information to decide whether adding new casinos is a good idea. If an addition can provide new jobs, she might be willing to support it, she said.

"I think it will be helpful to have more information," Sorenson said.

Others, like Senate Majority Leader Patricia Blevins, D-Elsmere, say their mind is almost made up, but they'll wait for the results of a study of the impact of new gambling venues.

"It would take a lot of convincing for me to come to a point where I would think it's a good idea to have additional venues," Blevins said.

If the study finds that none of the existing casinos will be affected and new venues will only mean more jobs and higher state revenues, Blevins said, she could be persuaded to support an expansion.

House Majority Leader Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, would like to see additional venues in Sussex County and possibly in Wilmington.

Schwartzkopf said expanded gambling will only bring more jobs to the area and he is confident the study will support his view.

Only if the study concludes that Delaware would lose jobs and tax revenues would Schwartzkopf be persuaded otherwise, he said.

The study everyone seems to be waiting for was part of an agreement among lawmakers, Gov. Jack Markell and the state's three established casinos when sports betting and table games were approved. Markell supported new venues last year but backed down, agreeing to a study of the possible impact.

The study, which is being conducted by TMG Consulting from New Orleans, is expected to be completed by the end of December.

When lawmakers return to session in January they will likely be asked to vote on whether additional venues should be permitted. Under Schwartzkopf's proposal, one additional venue -- DelPointe Resort and Racino -- would be allowed to add slot machines and table games.

Rep. Dennis P. Williams, D-Wilmington North, has co-sponsored an amendment to the bill that would also create a casino district in Wilmington, where city and state officials would be empowered to authorize another venue.

To complicate the issue, table games still need a final legislative vote from lawmakers, including signing off on regulations and the tax levels.

Schwartzkopf said he won't bring the table games legislation to the floor for a debate unless the House is also willing to consider the measure to approve new venues.

Williams, who is hoping to join forces with Schwartzkopf to get both measures approved, said he doesn't think a newer proposal by Kevin Flynn, a Philadelphia real estate developer, and George Miller, a

lawyer-entrepreneur in Atlantic City who worked with Donald Trump, to build a facility on the Christina River is feasible.

Williams said the Seventh Street site would require a large infrastructure overhaul including a new bridge that would cost at least $9 million. Even if developers offer to pay for the bridge, Williams said he would be worried that the state would get stuck with the bill.

Williams said he suspects there are lots of developers ready to vie for the chance to open a casino in Wilmington, including many who already operate casinos in other areas.

"They just haven't flipped their cards yet," Williams said.

Being First Lady (WILNJ)

By Mary Alice Garrett, Special To The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

The role of first lady of Delaware has advantages and a few disadvantages.

This was the conclusion of the current governor's wife and two former governors' wives who spoke earlier this month at DuPont Country Club in Rockland. The occasion was "Campaigns, Canapes and Chicken Dinners: A Conversation with Delaware First Ladies," a fundraiser sponsored by Fresh Start, a charitable branch of Wilmington Women in Business.

The conversation was with Carla Markell, wife of Gov. Jack Markell; Martha Carper, wife of U.S. Sen. Tom Carper; and Jane Castle, wife of U.S. Rep. Mike Castle.

"What was the biggest surprise about being first lady?" asked moderator Nancy Karibjanian, former anchor for WHYY's "Delaware Tonight" and now an adjunct professor at the University of Delaware.

"The biggest surprise is I'm enjoying it more than I expected. It's really a lot of fun," said Markell. Castle said being first lady of Delaware "is a lot more visible" than being a congressional wife. Carper concurred, adding, "There's more of a defined role being first lady."

Both Markell and Carper said their children prefer their fathers not accompany them on their activities. However, "they do it all the time," noted Carper. "They say it's better without him."

Castle said "there are challenges" to having her husband shop with her in a supermarket. "I tell Mike 'Stay in the car.' "

Carper recalled her husband coming to a birthing class in a tuxedo and bringing a briefcase into the delivery room.

The women were asked how they maintain their own identities. "I refer to the first lady as not really me and in the third person," said Markell. Castle said maintaining separate identities is a priority for her and her husband.

Do their spouses ask them for advice? Markell said although they discuss issues, her husband usually goes fast asleep once his head hits the pillow. "If he really listened to me, I don't know that he would have run for governor," Markell said, smiling at the audience.

"I do manage to weigh-in on issues," Castle added. Carper said they "don't debate. We're sort of like real people. We don't have a lot of heavy conversations."

Does publicity about their husbands bother them?

"It's part of being in public life," said Castle. Markell and Carper agreed. "The children read the blogs. They think it's funny," added Markell. She reads the newspaper every day. "I don't internalize everything they [the media] say."

All three said they would never consider running for public office themselves. Markell said although "Jack loves what he's doing, I don't think I would really salivate to do it again." She added that the last governor's race was long, but "it was a very congenial race." She noted that contender John Carney was very considerate.

Castle closed by saying, "We're gearing up for a big race," referring to the 2010 U.S. Senate race. "It's 363 days from today," she told the audience of 250.

Markell met her husband while both were students at Newark High School. They went on to graduate from the University of Delaware. They've been married for 19 years and have two children, Molly and Michael. Carla Markell has worked in corporate training and human resources. She's also been a mentor to several at-risk students, and she's an advocate for the arts.

A native of Brandywine Hundred, Castle is also a UD graduate. She married then-Gov. Mike Castle in 1992 and was a first lady only six months before he was elected congressman. Jane Castle worked on Capitol Hill for 10 years and later for a Washington architectural/engineering firm. She's been active in the community, serving on the boards of United Way of Delaware, Mental Health Association in Delaware, Literacy Volunteers of America, Christiana Care and the Wilmington Senior Center.

Born in Boone, N.C., Carper is a graduate of Appalachian State University and the University of Tennessee. In 1986, she married Tom Carper. The couple has two sons, Christopher and Ben, both in college. She joined the DuPont Co. in 1975. She held a number of management positions, including global business manager for Lycra. Since retiring from DuPont, Carper has been become a professor at UD. She's been active with Delaware Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls Inc. of Delaware and Boy Scouts of America.

Fresh Start awards college scholarships to Delaware women "who have faced personal and economic challenges," said president Mary Maloney. More than $60,000 in scholarships was granted to 35 women this year, and 100 women have received more than $300,000 since the nonprofit began in 1996. Details: www.wwb.org.

Debate Heated On Proposed Apology For Slavery From State (WILNJ)

By James Merriweather, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

DOVER -- Amid sometimes frayed tempers, Dover residents offered a range of opinions on whether the Delaware General Assembly should issue an apology for slavery.

Many speakers said an apology would be too little, too late and questioned the sincerity of any such gesture that might be issued by a state that was among the last to formally repudiate slavery. Kathy Doyle, a Campus Community Charter School teacher who swelled the crowd by offering extra credit for attendance to one of her classes, said she was appalled to learn that the state did not ratify the 13th Amendment, which ostensibly ended slavery in 1865, until 1901.

"If Alabama could apologize for slavery," she said, drawing applause from many in the crowd of about 70 residents, "we think that Delaware surely could."

Others insisted, though, that an apology for the ongoing vestiges of slavery -- namely Jim Crow laws that institutionalized racism long after slavery was abolished -- was more appropriate than apologizing for slavery itself.

"I think the apology should be issued for discriminatory laws passed in the 20th century," said Della Sue Robinson, adding that she questioned the validity of an apology coming from people who had nothing to do with slavery.

The debate represented the beginning of the commission's second try to persuade the Dover City Council to pass a resolution -- adopted unanimously by the commission on April 25, 2007 -- calling on the state Legislature to apologize for slavery on behalf of the state. After hearing debate in May 2007, the council sent the proposal back to the commission with instructions to conduct a series of public forums on the issue.

Sam Hoff, the commission chairman and the primary author of the resolution, said Wednesday night's session was the first of two forums the commission will conduct before the matter is taken back to the council.

In serving notice of Wednesday night's forum, the commission sent a white paper of sorts to council members, noting that the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives and legislatures in six states -- Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Alabama, Florida and New Jersey -- had adopted resolutions of apology for slavery. The letter included the text of all eight resolutions as well as the text of the commission's own proposal -- by which the council would call on the legislature to adopt a resolution "acknowledging and expressing its profound apology for the state's practice of slavery and for the historic wrongs committed against all persons who suffered discrimination and injustice under this dehumanizing system ... ."

At one point, Sen. Margaret Rose Henry, D-Wilmington East, said she had considered introducing legislation to provide an opportunity for a vote on the issue, but reported that she found little support for an apology and didn't file a bill.

Hoff, a political science professor at Delaware State University, has described slavery as the most shameful crime against humanity ever committed in Delaware. He argued that an apology was the first step toward earning forgiveness from blacks and improving race relations in the First State.

At Wednesday night's hearing, several speakers agreed, saying an apology would represent a big step toward reconciliation.

"I came to support the idea of an apology," said 62-year-old James Brooks, a 14-year Delaware resident who first visited the state as an enlisted man at Dover Air Force Base in 1966. "I think it's high time. I think we should have apologized decades ago, when we first knew it was wrong."

Lafayette Bell said that racism and discrimination are still rampant, however, and an apology for slavery would not count for much.

"Even if an apology is given," he said, "it's not going to help African Americans much. Most African Americans don't think its genuine anyway."

Jahi Issa, a history professor at DSU, said history would not judge the state well if an apology was not issued.

"Slavery is not to far behind us," he said. "As the First State, I believe we should have been the first state to apologize for slavery. History is judging us. We don't want to be the last."

Town Urges Ban On Driver Texting (WILNJ)

By Michael Short, The (salisbury, Md.) Daily Times

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

OCEAN VIEW -- Town Council will send a letter to the state, urging officials to ban texting and e-mailing while driving.

In recent months, a number of Sussex County towns have taken similar measures.

Texting while driving has been called a "dangerous practice," and some say it's imperative that there be repercussions for those who drive distracted.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, text messaging is banned for all drivers in 11 states, including Maryland, Virginia and New Jersey. Delaware is one of 10 states that prohibit texting by novice drivers.

"AAA calls for passage of a texting-while-driving ban in Delaware," said Catherine Rossi, spokeswoman for AAA Mid-Atlantic. "AAA discourages motorists from engaging in any distraction while behind the wheel, and texting is the epitome of distracted driving."

In a AAA poll conducted this year, 96 percent of Delawareans supported a texting ban.

Legislation banning texting and e-mailing while driving overwhelmingly passed the House earlier this year and is currently on the Senate Ready List.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Joe Miro, R-Pike Creek Valley, initially sought to bar the use of handheld cell phones, but dropped that provision when it became clear the proposal lacked sufficient support.

"[The bill] is not everything I wanted," Miro said earlier this year. "But I am a guy who listens and compromises when I have to in order to achieve something that will improve the safety of all the people on our roads. I think it is a victory for all of us who want to make Delaware roads safer."

While the proposed law would apply to all motorists, Miro believes it will have the greatest impact on young adults.

"This [bill] would prohibit [texting] and hopefully make sure that they are paying attention to what's in front of them," he said.

Ocean View plans to send its letter to Sen. George H. Bunting, D-Bethany Beach, for review.

While town officials considered enacting their own ban, some believe a state ban would be easier to enforce.

"I don't think we have any way at all of policing it," Councilman Bill Wichmann said. "By the time an officer finds out if they are texting, they'll be out of town."

If enacted, Delaware's legislation would carry a penalty of a $50 fine.

Program To Restore Natural Habitat Shows Success (WILNJ)

By Alex Ruoff, The (salisbury, Md.) Daily Times

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

SEAFORD -- For the past few years, Glenn Lovelace's dream has been to transform nearly all of his 50 acres of land into a natural bird habitat.

So, about three years ago, he let his fields go fallow and last year entered into the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Landowner Incentive Program to get some assistance.

The program has restored and enhanced more than 1,300 acres of natural habitat in Delaware by providing economic incentives to private landowners. But the future of the program is unclear as the federal government has not been able to fund the project since 2006.

Now, state environmental agents are hoping to use what's left in their coffers to support just a few, high-priority areas.

"The commission [which selects the projects] will most likely choose just one big project or some we consider high priority," said Shelley Tovell, an environmental specialist for DNREC's Department of Fish and Wildlife. "We're really looking at the last of the money."

Through the program, Lovelace was able to take about 40 acres of land and create a newly restored home for local birds that have been driven out of the area by a lack of suitable areas to nest.

Through the federally funded assistance program, the state pays private landowners to maintain natural habitat for species of great conservation need, DNREC officials said. Property owners receive technical and financial assistance for their efforts.

Lovelace said he's already seen results on his land.

"I've seen some different birds move in," he said. "I've seen high counts on several different species already."

Tovell said federal aid for the program, provided through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has ended, leaving her uncertain as to whether the program will live on past the barely $200,000 left.

"One of the reasons we had such a great response is that [the program] was funded 75 [percent] through federal funds," she said. "Most programs are a 50/50 split, so this was fairly inexpensive for us."

Tovell said anyone who's already signed a contract is guaranteed their money, but expanding efforts will be impossible without extra funding. While the state has a number of alternative programs, Tovell said LIP's popularity was its economic incentives.

Byron Jefferson, of Lincoln, said he joined the program to preserve nearly 100 acres of his property because he could get a better price than renting it out for farming. He said he's pleased with the results and is glad to be providing natural habitat and renewed forest. When his contract ends, he may not continue to preserve the area if financial aid is unavailable.

Interested landowners may request an application by calling 735-3600. Proposals for 2010 funding will be accepted through Dec. 14.

Many Numbers To Reach Del. Government (WILNJ)

By Ken Mammarella, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Yes, so much information and so much contact between Delawareans and their state government are moving online.

But sometimes -- for people who aren't online, for people who aren't sure where to go or for people frustrated with what they encounter online -- a phone call may be more desirable.

A Wilmington phone book has six pages of state government listings. What follows are toll-free phone numbers that are promoted for connecting to Delaware state government.

The most important numbers

The most important number of them all is 911, for life-threatening medical and public safety.

Dispatchers are ready to direct medical and law enforcement personnel to the rescue. In response to a recent question in Spark about a mattress in the middle of the highway, Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh said "Anytime there's a risk of serious physical injury or a traffic crash, it's absolutely appropriate to call 911." Calls are triaged and divided up among appropriate agencies, he said. Non-emergency number for Delaware State Police is (800) 837-3771.

The new 211 service -- from Delaware Helpline with support from the United Way and the state -- is a quick way to connect to thousands of health and human services programs, including rent assistance,

food banks, affordable housing, health resources, mental health resources, child care, after-school programs, care for senior citizens, financial assistance, legal assistance and job training programs.

As helpful as that is, it's only answered during extended weekday business hours. (Delaware Helpline hopes to staff that number 24/7 in a few years). Ditto for the nonprofit's other number, (800) 464-4357.

Hotlines that reach people

The phone book and the state's own Web site list a number of hotlines. These numbers were tested from New Castle County and answered outside of regular business hours. Some numbers were answered by people in other states or by answering services.

Child abuse and emotional problems. (800) 292-9582 connects to the Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families. For emergency help with children's emotional problems, (800) 722-7710 is also maintained.

Crime victims and survivors: (800) 842-8461 connects to a person at state police. (800) 870-1790 is the attorney general's office and goes to voice-mail at off-hours.

Delaware Crime Stoppers: (800) 847-3333.

Diseases and bioterrorism: (888) 295-5156.

Domestic abuse: (800) 743-5754.

Environment. (800) 662-8802. This is a general number for the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, including air and waste management and parks and recreation. Environmental concerns including open burning, chemical spills, pesticide spills, emissions from factories, illegal dumping on land (such as at the three yard-waste sites in New Castle County) and at sea.

Fishing violations, inland bays. (800) 523-3336 is a DNREC number for fishing violations and for polution in the inland bays of Sussex County.

Mental health: (800) 652-2929. This leads to a mobile unit that handles crisis intervention, drug and alcohol crises, pyschiatric emergencies and severe personal, family, or marital problems.

Poison: (800) 222-1222, which is routed to local poison centers no matter where you call from.

Roads: (800) 324-8379 is maintained by the Delaware Department of Transportation. The Transportation Management Center is the place to go to report problems (such as a traffic signal that's not working, debris or wild animals) or ask questions (when's that road repair scheduled to end?).

Sexual violence, sucide and parents thinking of surrendering a baby: Contact Delaware, 761-9100 in New Castle County, (800) 262-9800 downstate.

Smoking Quitline: (866) 409-1858.

Wildlife. (800) 292-3030 is DNREC's Wildlife Operation Game Theft Hotline Operation Game Theft. Tips that lead to the arrest and conviction of people violating state hunting and wildlife laws can lead to rewards of up to $1,000.

Hotlines that reach interactive recordings

Access Delaware: (866) 276-2353, for the status of your state income tax refund or to find polling places or free public Web access.

School closings: (877) 831-7215

Other toll-free numbers

The following numbers are ones that Delaware residents (as contrasted to state employees or businesses) might use to reach state government. A state Web page (http://delaware.gov/egov/portal.nsf/portal/tollfree) lists dozens.

COMPLAINTS, TIPS

Alcohol violations: (800) 393-7327.

Consumer protection, debt management: (800) 220-5424

Fraud, waste, and abuse of state government resources: (800) 553-7283.

Governor's office: (800) 292-9570.

Home health care or hospice agencies: (800) 942-7373.

Housing law violations: 877-544-8626.

Indoor smoking ban violations: (800) 297-5926.

Insurance companies, agents: (800) 282-8611.

Insurance fraud: (800) 632-5154.

Long-term care facilities: (877) 453-0012.

Mosquito control: (800) 338-8181.

Pesticide misuse: (800) 282-8685.

EDUCATION

Delaware Educator Data System: 888-759-9133. For people obtaining teaching certification.

Groves Diploma at a Distance: (888) 321-4723. For adult learners obtaining high school diplomas.

Higher Education Commission: (800) 292-7935. Scholarships, grants and college-prep information.

K-12 education: (877) 838-3787.

School-related crime, including bullying: (800) 220-5414.

Upward Bound: (866) 227-5566. Program to prepare students for college in partnership with the University of Delaware.

HEALTH, PUBLIC WELFARE

Aging, adults with physical disabilities: (800) 223-9074.

Child care licensing: (800) 822-2236.

Child Development Watch: (800) 671-0050. Program for children ages birth to 3 with disabilities or developmental delays.

Deaf-blind children: (800) 292-9590.

Elderinfo insurance counseling: (800) 336-9500. For people with Medicare.

HIV/AIDS: (800) 422-0429.

Immunizations: (800) 282-8672.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, food stamps, subsidized child care and Refugee Cash Assistance programs: (800) 372-2022.

Women, Infants and Children; nutrition and physical activity: (800) 222-2189.

LIBRARIES AND DATA

Delaware Division of Libraries: (800) 282-8696.

Legislative Council Research: (800) 282-8545. Legislative research and the Delaware Register of Regulations.

Library for the Blind/Handicapped: (800) 282-8676.

TAXES

Tax forms: (800) 292-7826.

Tax refund status: (866) 276-2353.

TRANSPORTATION

DART: (800) 355-8080 for customer relations, (800) 652-3278 for reservations.

DelDOT: (800) 652-5600.

Rideshare Delaware: (888) 743-3628.

OTHER CALLS

Agriculture emergencies: 877-831-7217.

Delaware Solid Waste Authority: (800) 404-7080.

Delaware Tourism Office: (800) 441-8846.

Housing: (888-363) 8808.

Juvenile fire setter intervention: (800) 432-8500.

Lottery numbers: (800) 338-6200. Remember, they're not official until they're verified.

Natural Resources and Environmental Control: (800) 922-9283.

State Fire School: (800) 282-8650.

Treasurer: (800) 675-8600. Personal finance tips.

Unemployment benefits: (800) 794-3032. Claim weekly unemployment insurance benefits by telephone.

Utilities: Public Advocate -- (888) 607-2427 -- advocates for consumers on utility rates. Public Service Commission -- (800) 282-8574 -- regulates utilities.

Veterans Affairs: (800) 344-9900. Assistance with veterans benefits and burial services.

Vital statistics: (877) 888-0248. Provides copies of birth, death, adoptee and marriage certificates.

Voting and elections: (877) 270-8300.

UD Community Pumped For Blood-drive Challenge (WILNJ)

By April Abel, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

NEWARK -- University of Delaware students and faculty were out for blood Wednesday.

Donating blood, that is.

About 500 people registered to donate blood for the 8th Annual Colonial Athletic Association Blood Challenge, which pits the school against 11 other schools in the athletic conference to collect the most blood donations in a one-day fall drive.

Last year, UD brought in 604 donations. Wednesday's goal: 900 donors.

"The competition is fierce among the schools. UD has won five times but was narrowly beaten by Drexel University for the last three years," said Carrie Aiken of the Blood Bank of Delmarva.

Blood Bank of Delmarva closed its donor centers for the day to provide staff and equipment.

"We can't announce the day's totals until the competition is over in early December," Aiken said.

But the real winners, blood bank leaders said, are the patients who will benefit from the lifesaving blood.

Over the past seven years, the CAA Blood Challenge has raised 17,728 units of blood.

The multipurpose rooms at the Trabant University Center in Newark were bustling Wednesday with a well-orchestrated scene of students and staff.

"We always get a lot of walk-ins," Aiken said.

Doors opened at 7:30 a.m. By 10 a.m., 30 beds were full and people were moving smoothly through the computer screening, donation and all-important snack break and brief monitoring afterwards.

UD nursing student Emily Wagner donates blood at least twice a year.

"I really do it for the cookies," she joked.

UD music faculty member Xiang Gao also said he donates blood regularly.

"As a musician, I give my best to help people. Giving blood is another way of giving my best," he said.

Gao was one of the many donors giving a traditional whole blood donation on a bed in the main donor area.

Along the wall, it got a little more high-tech.

The Blood Bank brought along all four of its ALYX anapheresis machines for this drive.

These fully automated machines allow qualified donors to give twice the amount of red blood cells in one donation.

Donors who meet height and weight criteria -- at least 5 feet 1 inches tall and weighing 130 pounds for men, or 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighing 150 pounds for women -- are offered the opportunity to donate blood via the ALYX machine.

The phlebotomist inserts the needle and line into the donor's arm, and ALYX draws the blood, separates red cells from plasma, and returns a mixture of sterile saline and plasma to the donor.

"The benefit of this is there is no net fluid loss for the donor, and the Blood Bank gets twice as many red blood cells from one donation," said Kathy Armstrong, of the Blood Bank.

Andrew Smith, 19, is a freshman at UD. He was donating via ALYX for the first time, and "felt no different" than when he gave a whole blood donation last year.

Armstrong offered Smith a choice of UD blue or gold elastic gauze to wrap the donation site, and sent him off to the snack table.

"I remember him from when he donated in high school," she said. "It was nice to see a familiar face."

New Learning Environment At Air Mobility Museum (WILNJ)

By The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Students from around the state visited the Air Mobility Command Museum in Dover on Wednesday to celebrate the 11th anniversary of GIS Day, an international even to promote awareness of geographic information systems.

TOP PHOTO: Seaira Williams (right), 10, a McVey Elementary student, lands her plane safely on a flight simulator, with a little help from volunteer David Doyle.

BELOW: With help from volunteer Maggie Legates (right), students put together a map of Europe on the floor using technology they are learning at the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover Air Force Base.

Working Together For Young Ones (WILNJ)

By Edward L. Kenney, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 18, 2009

With three early childhood centers -- and another on the way if the upcoming referendum passes -- the Appoquinimink School District has buttressed with action the belief that children should start learning well before grade school.

But it has not stopped there. Rather than wait for children ages 3 to 5 to enroll in the centers, district leaders have developed an outreach program that trains Middletown-area day care providers to give the children an even earlier head start.

"In the past, the school district and the community providers sort of passed [like ships] in the night, so to speak, yet we're all sharing the same kids," said Sandra Cohee, principal at the Cedar Lane Early Childhood Center. "We give them a more in-depth view of what we do at school. This has opened up a conduit of information."

Cohee, the leaders of the other two early childhood centers and an educational diagnostician make up the leadership in a newly formed Preschool Coalition Committee that plans training for the day care providers.

The district has worked with the providers informally for the past 10 years, beginning when the Appoquinimink Early Childhood Center opened its doors as the first such center in the district, she said.

But this year marks an effort to give the initiative better structure, a move necessitated both because of district growth and the growing number of day care centers in the Middletown area, now about 15.

"There are other districts that are doing similar things, but not as formalized as we are doing it," Cohee said. "It's a great idea. And it really has opened up communication, so we are on the same page as the providers."

"Developing this liaison helps to build a bridge," added committee member Lucia Weathers, assistant principal at the Townsend Early Childhood Center.

Licensed day care providers are required by state law to receive 18 hours of training a year in subjects such as classroom management, parental involvement, developing fine and gross motor skills, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Providers usually have to pay for that training, but the district offers it free, holding sessions as part of evening dinner meetings that have drawn as many as 75 day care people.

Meetings are held every two to three months and are assigned a training theme, Cohee said. One scheduled for January will be about discipline.

Rene Nolen, the principal at the Appoquinimink Early Childhood Center and a member of the Preschool Coalition Committee, said the district also can teach things that will help the children with social skills such as sharing and teamwork, paving the way for the more academic lessons to come.

"Then when they get here, they're ready for reading and words and counting," she said.

"The kindergarten year is so critical," added fellow committee member Kathy Gertley, a district educational diagnostician who used to go out on her own to the day care centers before things got better organized. "It just sets them up for success in their educational career.

"We want them to instill in them the love of learning," she said of the day care providers.

As an owner of the Kiddie Academy childcare center in Middletown, Susan Tudor appreciates the training the district is giving her 20 teachers.

"It's a good opportunity to get those hours and not have to pay for it," she said. "In early childcare, it's definitely not a career you go into to make money. As a business owner, I wish I could say I will pay for all your training, but I can't afford it."

Tudor also likes what the teachers are taking away from the training, which cannot help but benefit the 115 children at her day care center.

"I think it helps educate my teachers, giving them different ideas," she said. "They can kind of feed off each other. I think it gives them a chance to grow together. It keeps my teachers fresh and aware of what's going on out there."

Said Weathers, "Those centers know that we value what they do, and just knowing that helps them to keep coming back."

Doctors Reject New Screening Guidelines (WILNJ)

By Angie Basiouny, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Some Delaware doctors are rejecting new recommendations from a federal panel advising women to wait until age 50 to get routine mammograms and abandon breast self-exams because they do no good.

The physicians said Wednesday they disagree with the reasoning behind the report and are telling patients, many of whom are confused about the news from the independent U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, to stick to conventional guidelines that call for self-exams and routine screenings at 40.

"It certainly was an easy one for me," Dr. Nick Petrelli, director of Christiana Care's Helen F. Graham Cancer Center, said of his decision to continue with current guidelines. "I've experienced this over the years with patients. I've seen it, I've seen the evidence, and we're not going to change."

Petrelli, a surgical oncologist, pointed to the significant reduction in mortality rates in the United States and around the world since women began screening in their 40s and even younger. He also does not see the logic in telling women to not perform self-exams, which often is a first step in early detection of tumors.

"Women know their bodes better than any physician or anybody else," he said. "I see no down side to self-examination. It certainly doesn't cost anything and it's not time consuming."

Cindy DelGiorno figures she would be dead by now if she had followed the new recommendations.

DelGiorno, a teacher at A.I. duPont High School, found a lump in her breast during a self-exam in 2007, when she was 34. A subsequent mammogram revealed a tumor. During chemotherapy, she realized that older women were having a much tougher time battling the disease and the effects of treatment.

"It's absurd. I couldn't believe it," she said of the report. "I don't know who this research group is, but do they want to kill off women? It's disturbing."

In Delaware and across the country, there is a rising chorus of health professionals, politicians and advocacy groups questioning the wisdom of the findings, which contend women in their 40s are more likely to get false-positive tests that can lead to unnecessary biopsies and anxiety.

The recommendations don't apply to women who carry a high risk of breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society reacted swiftly to the report and posted a statement Monday on its Web site that the organization remains with its long-standing position advocating for yearly screenings starting at age 40. The American College of Radiology also was critical of the findings, saying it would result in countless unnecessary deaths each year.

Federal policy unchanged

To ease confusion, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius said Wednesday the task force does not set federal policy and the government's view on screenings at 40 remains unchanged.

"My message to women is simple," she said. "Mammograms have always been an important lifesaving tool in the fight against breast cancer and they still are today. Keep doing what you have been doing for years -- talk to your doctor about your individual history, ask questions and make the decision that is right for you."

That advice is echoed by the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition, an awareness and support organization that runs the state mammography van, which is about to be retrofitted to use the latest in digital imaging.

Coalition Executive Director Vicky Cooke said the office phone has been ringing all week with women wanting to know what they should do. The report has been the topic of debate among staff members for days.

In the end, she said, the group opted to follow the current rules. It's a break from the position taken by the National Breast Cancer Coalition, which has endorsed the new recommendations.

"We're an organization that relies on responsible information, and right now there is a lot of confusion," Cooke said. "So we are going to step back and continue to do what we've always done and operate by the current guidelines."

Officials with the Delaware Division of Public Health declined to be interviewed and released a statement saying they are studying the recommendations and working with the state's Cancer Consortium to determine the implications for Delaware.

Dr. Tom Vaughan, director of women's health and chairman for diagnostic imaging for Bayhealth Medical Center, said he thinks the task force focused too much on the costs, time and other negatives associated with benign tumors and not enough on the benefits of early detection. He said mammograms aren't perfect, but they are powerful tools in helping save lives.

"My experience with an extensive number of biopsies is that most people, even if there is a 1 percent chance that they have cancer, are happy to have this done," he said.

Dr. Wendy Newell, a breast surgeon in private practice with Wolf Creek Surgeons in Dover, agreed with Vaughan and Petrelli from Christiana Care. She said the task force needs to rescind the guidelines and worries that the news will set back decades of work to educate women about early detection.

She's continuing to advise patients to screen at 40 and learn how to conduct self exams.

"They could end up having a more advanced breast cancer if they wait every other year, or they could end up dying," Newell said.

Breast-cancer survivor, Newark resident Terri Stuiber, also is upset with the report and pondered her fate had she followed the advice.

"I would probably not be here right now," she said.

Stuiber found her lump during a self-exam two years ago, when she was 47, and had a bilateral mastectomy. Like DelGiorno, she had no family history of breast cancer.

When she first heard about the report, she thought maybe it was a mistake.

"I went crazy, especially when they said don't even teach breast self-exams," Stuiber said. "I was floored that anybody would come out with that. I have two daughters. I would never want them to take that lightly. I tell them to get educated and have their checkups."

Thanksgiving Is All About The Turkey (WILNJ)

By Molly Murray, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

With Thanksgiving a week away, it's crunch time at TA Farms in Wyoming. So many turkeys, so many platters to fill.

These birds -- raised on a mixture of corn, soybeans and minerals -- are organic, free-range turkeys.

"We grow our own feed, we make our own feed," Dan Palmer said. "It makes them taste juicier and have more flavor."

Then, there are the store-bought birds.

"Created," said Sherrie Rosenblatt, a spokeswoman for the National Turkey Federation, "to fulfill consumer desire for white meat."

These birds were selectively bred for large breasts, lots of white meat and a speedy growth process.

About 90 percent of households in the United States will eat an organic turkey like Palmer grows or the store-bought kind this Thanksgiving. In all, some 46 million turkeys will be sold for the holiday, Rosenblatt said.

But the real purist may want to hone the hunter-gatherer instinct, don the mossy oak camoflauge and bag a wild turkey for the feast.

"They are very good eating," said Matt DiBona, a wildlife biologist with the state Division of Fish & Wildlife.

There's only one problem. Delaware doesn't have a fall hunting season for wild turkey, so unless a hunter planned ahead in spring, a Delaware wild turkey won't be on the Thanksgiving menu.

In some ways, it is a small conservation miracle the state has a season -- or wild turkeys -- at all.

The population in Delaware was wiped out by the mid-1800s and they were pretty much gone from throughout their native, East Coast range in the mid- to late 1800s, said Bob Eriksen, director of conservation operations and a regional wildlife biologist with the National Wild Turkey Federation.

The last wild turkey in New York was killed in 1846. The last wild bird in Connecticut died in 1813.

Extensive deforestation made a 19th century comeback next to impossible, Eriksen said.

Over time, marginal farmland that had been cleared began to revert back to forest. In the early 1960s and 1970s, efforts to bring back the birds began, Eriksen said.

By the end of the 1800s, an estimated 220,000 wild turkeys were left in the continental United States, compared to an estimated 10 million to 12 million when Colonists arrived from Europe, Eriksen said.

Today, there are an estimated 7 million to 7. 5 million birds in 49 states. Eriksen said the only state without a population of wild turkeys is Alaska.

These days, the East Coast is terrific wild turkey habitat because of productive forests with lots of seeds, nuts and berries -- all foods that wild turkeys eat, he said.

Delaware officials began a reintroduction program in Sussex County in 1984. As those birds thrived and more were added, they began a trapping program to introduce birds to Kent County. In early 2002, more birds were brought in from South Carolina and Virginia and released in New Castle County, DiBona said.

There are an estimated 4,000 wild turkeys in the state, he said. "It is probably one of the greatest conservation success stories ever."

Still, the population isn't big enough yet to allow a fall hunting season. The spring season in 2010 is three weeks, starting April 10.

These wild birds are the cousins of the birds that Palmer raises and sells, and also are related to the ones shoppers find in the grocery store.

On that first Thanksgiving, back at Plymouth Rock, the wild turkey dished up by the Wampanoag wasn't something new for the Pilgrims.

Turkeys were first caged and domesticated in Central Mexico more than 2,000 years ago. And when the Spaniards arrived in the new world, they took the bird back to Europe.

Of course, the bird the Pilgrims ate in 1621 was way different than the broad-breasted birds of today's table, and was probably even different from the wild turkeys we see today.

The grocery store birds grow quickly.

Palmer's birds -- even with their all-natural diet -- put on pounds at a speedy rate, going from day-old pullets to dinner-table size in 16 to 20 weeks. A 20-week-old turkey at TA Farms dresses out to 24 pounds.

Wild birds don't have those snowy-white feathers, and they grow much slower. Their diet is different, and because they are foragers, they are much more muscled, Eriksen said.

A wild turkey that hatched back in June won't be nearly as big. The male will weigh 10 to 12 pounds and the female 6 or 7, Eriksen said. A domestic male of the same age would weigh 30 pounds, he said.

Selective breeding has allowed the bigger birds with the white feathers. There is even a farm-raised turkey that grows to 80 pounds, he said.

Imagine fitting that in your oven.

The wild birds aren't as meaty -- diet and a higher level of activity probably have something to do with that, Eriksen said.

But for people who want a wild bird, there is nothing quite like it in the world of hunting, DiBona said.

The birds have exceptional eyesight. Deer, on the other hand, have an exceptional sense of smell.

"We joke that if you could have an animal with the sense of smell of a deer and the eyesight of a turkey, you'd have an unhuntable animal," DiBona said.

It takes lots of preparation to figure out where turkeys are roosting, and a hunter can't talk or move around once the spot is selected. Turkey hunters typically call in the birds using a series of devices that mimic the sounds that turkeys make.

And when they do take a shot, it's at close range.

In hunting, "it's probably the most fun you can have," DiBona said.

Autumn's Final Gifts (WILNJ)

By Nature's Landscapes, By Rick J. Lewandowski

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

With a suddenness out of character with our typical autumnal explosion of foliage colors, this season came to an abrupt and dramatic close.

Somehow, I'd been lulled into taking for granted the late season floral displays and sumptuous colors of foliage that every year seemed to go on for weeks. So you can probably understand my surprise when, with frigid finality, the first killing frost of the season struck with temperatures hovering in the mid-20s.

And, as if to drive the point home, the region was then pummeled by one of the strongest nor'easters in recent memory. Over three days, its winds and driving rains wrenched from the trees most of the remaining leaves not damaged by frost, leaving branches exposed and forlorn.

Frankly, I was left with a hollow feeling that I'd missed the opportunity to fully appreciate autumn.

Even so, I was determined to find some consolation in the pre-winter landscape as nature took one last deep breath before plunging into winter. So, out for a walk I went.

Stark silhouettes of tree trunks with sharp shadows cast on the ground now replaced the deep shade of summer. Oddly attractive, I thought. Had I noticed before?

Shuffling along paths laden with newly fallen wind-blown leaves, I was also reminded of the simple pleasure of being immersed in this sea of brown that parted at the slightest movement of my feet.

Perhaps all wasn't lost after all; in fact, I was starting to feel a little better already.

It was then that I discovered to my delight, and not so unexpectedly as it turns out, that the frost-laden air of early November and harsh treatment by the nor'easter hadn't completely obliterated the last

glimmer of autumn's spectacle. In fact, the layered tree canopy had offered its last leaves as a sacrifice to the frigid air, wind, and rain in order to protect the shrubs and perennials lying at its feet.

Indeed, I realized that the garden was more than just the remnants of leaves and branches left behind by frost and storm; there was considerable life left in this late season landscape for us to appreciate.

A gaggle of goodies

Armed with this new perspective, I ran back to grab my camera and laptop so I could share some of the late-season garden joy I'd discovered. I realized there was surely a spot in gardens for these plants, in particular, to extend the season right up to the very precipice of autumn's end.

Honestly, November is probably not at the top of the list for season-ending flower highlights. Yet, in my stroll through the garden some plants really stood out.

Among the best perennials still flowering were the pale lavender-flowered Raydon's Favorite aromatic aster (Symphyotrichum oblongifolium), the deep purple-flowered Georgia aster (Symphyotrichum georgianum), and the pale yellow-flowered Mellow Yellow sunflower (Helianthus angustifolius) as well as the delicate yellow-flowered, multi-stemmed tree, common witch hazel (Hamamelis virginiana).

While colorful foliage is a reliable feature of autumn in our region, a few plants withstood killing frost and storms particularly well, retaining their leaves and color. These plants added an even greater allure to the late-season luster of the garden because of their durability.

The fine textured golden yellow autumn foliage of Arkansas blue star (Amsonia hubrichtii) represents one of only a handful of perennials with colorful autumn foliage and is a colorful companion to the golden autumn foliage of Carolina sweet-shrub (Calycanthus floridus).

Other shrubs such as Mt. Airy fothergilla with its yellowish to pale red foliage, sweet azalea (Rhododendron arborescens) with its fiery red foliage, and oakleaf hydrangea (Hydrangea quercifolia) with foliage colors ranging from green and yellow to purple and wine red, weathered the late autumn conditions admirably, proving their worth.

Even though it is an uncommon garden shrub, Alabama croton (Croton alabamensis) may have offered the most striking late autumn foliage, showcasing pumpkin-orange leaves with silvery undersides.

Each autumn we certainly expect showy fruit displays. Yet, the early departure of most fall foliage this year made fruit an even more important feature for late-season interest.

The dense clusters of lavender-purple berries on American beautyberry (Callicarpa americana) provide some of the most unusual color to be found in the garden. Masses of brilliant red fruit on Winter King hawthorn (Crataegus viridis) and bright yellow fruit of Winter Gold winterberry holly (Ilex verticillata) highlighted their staying power that will insure continued beauty well into winter.

Even American holly (Ilex opaca) with its red fruit displays, provided a special appeal with the early departure of deciduous leaves, reaffirming its important quality as an evergreen tree that keeps the garden interesting even in winter.

Certainly, there are other plants that proved their worth this autumn, but these plants highlight some of late autumn's best performers.

I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention that each year brings with it a unique set of seasonal conditions.

Some years can be quirky; others are not. You might not see all these plants performing well so late each autumn but, in my humble opinion, the pleasure of having them brighten the garden for their normal

beauty as well as the off chance that you might even get a few extra days of interest make them well worth the effort.

As gardeners, our powers of observation are often the most important tools we have. Don't be shy. Get outside and study what is happening in the landscape. Keen observations and a curious mind offer innumerable opportunities for us to enhance our gardens.

While autumn is now truly nearing an end, be sure to enjoy the changing light and the drama of contrast in the landscape.

Remember, too, as I've recently rediscovered that, when you least expect it, you're almost sure to learn something new!

Liquor Store Clerk Had 'No Choice' (WILNJ)

By Adam Taylor, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

WILMINGTON -- Before the night clerk at Favors Liquor Store could react Tuesday night, one armed robber jumped through the take-out window and another ran behind the counter.

"One had a gun at his head and the other had a gun at his chest," said Ed Pensky, the store's owner.

Shortly after money was taken from the cash register, the clerk pulled his own gun and shots were fired, Pensky said. The clerk shot one of the men, who ran on North Walnut Street and collapsed about 30 feet away. He was pronounced dead at Christiana Hospital.

Pensky, 67, has owned Favors Liquor Store for more than two years.

Before that, he owned another liquor store for 10 years in northeast Wilmington.

Because both neighborhoods are among the poorest and most violent in the city, Pensky and his employees are well armed.

In addition to the .40-caliber Glock pistol the clerk used in the shooting, police confiscated two guns and a can of Mace in the tiny store that weren't involved in the robbery. One is a .380-caliber pistol kept under the counter in a cigar box and the other is a 12-gauge shotgun kept in a corner.

The man who died was identified Wednesday as 20-year-old Kendel Miller of the 500 block of W. 39th St. in Wilmington. The other man escaped.

Pensky was at his Pike Creek home when the robbery took place around 9:30 p.m. He went to the store and then to the police station.

Pensky said his employee fired because Miller was turning toward him with a gun.

"He knew he was about to get shot," Pensky said. "There was no choice."

Though the investigation isn't complete, it appears the clerk was defending himself, said Wilmington police Master Sgt. Steven Barnes. He also said it's legal to carry nonconcealed weapons in a business and no permits are required.

The weapons are all tools of the trade when it comes to running a liquor store in Wilmington's toughest neighborhoods, Pensky said. When he opened the store Wednesday morning, it still had blood in the doorway. And Pensky had his .38 Sig Sauer pistol hanging from his belt.

"I don't do it to show off; I do it to say to people, 'Please, I don't want any trouble,' " Pensky said.

"I love the liquor business, but it comes with two very wanted, dangerous commodities -- booze and cash," he said.

Pensky only had to fire his gun once before when his High Spirit liquor store at 24th and Jessup streets was robbed several years ago, he said. He fired warning shots into the air and the robbers fled.

Favors was robbed once before since Pensky has owned it. It happened around closing, which Pensky thinks is the most dangerous time, because money from an entire day's work is there.

The store has a video surveillance system, but Pensky said a power surge rendered it inoperable about a month ago and he hasn't gotten it repaired yet, so there is no video of Tuesday's robbery.

Delaware State Police Senior Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh said the department doesn't take a stand on whether it's a good idea for merchants to arm themselves.

"But we do advise that it's always better to comply with someone's demands than to put themselves into harm's way," he said.

Wilmington Councilman Steve Martelli, a former city police officer, said it's not uncommon for small business owners in Wilmington to be armed, especially if they run a business that deals with a lot of cash.

"When I was on the force, we always hoped that they would be responsible gun owners by taking marksmanship and gun safety courses," he said. "We didn't want people out there untrained, trying to be renegades or vigilantes."

Police Chief Michael Szczerba agreed.

"If business owners are going to arm themselves, they should do it in a safe and responsible manner," he said.

Pensky said he had to Mace a regular customer about three weeks ago when he lunged at him in a threatening way. Wednesday, the customer was back at the store and had a friendly conversation with Pensky. "All was forgiven a couple days after the Macing," Pensky said.

Pensky, who is white, said he enjoys interacting with his clientele, which he said is mostly poor and black.

"I go across the street to say hello," he said. "If anything bad happens to someone's family around here, I send them a case of beer and a half-gallon of gin."

But there are sad parts of his business as well.

A 47-year-old customer comes in each morning shaking from alcohol withdrawal before his first half-pint of vodka of the day. Pensky said the man looks older than he is, even though he is 30 years younger.

Mostly, though, Pensky said he has a grand time joking around with his customers.

"I love the liquor business because 99.9 percent of my customers are fantastic," he said. "My wife says I get an adrenaline rush when I'm living on the edge."

Another clerk, Shantae Hughes, 27, was in the back room when Tuesday's robbery took place. She also was present last week when her brother was shot on West Fourth Street. Her brother thought he was about to get into a fistfight, but the other man pulled out a gun and shot him.

His wounds are not life-threatening, she said.

Hughes was back at work Wednesday.

"It's been rough, but I have strong people in my life, so I'm getting through it," she said.

Child Pornographer Gets 30 Years (WILNJ)

By Esteban Parra, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

A 42-year-old New Castle man was sentenced Wednesday to 30 years in prison for producing child pornography, including at least one video and thousands of still images.

In addition to the prison term, District Judge Joseph J. Farnan Jr. sentenced William A. Phillips to 10 years probation. He also will have to register as a sex offender.

Farnan said he found the "criminal conduct to be horrendous" and that Phillips had "raped [his child victim] for the camera."

According to federal attorneys, investigators recovered more than 500 videos and 200,000 images of child pornography stored on some 20 CDs and a computer hard drive.

Most of the illicit videos and images were downloaded from the Internet but several hundred were pictures Phillips took of "Jane Doe 1" at the home that belonged to his family outside Llangollen Estates.

Prosecutors said Jane Doe 1 was located and is safe.

There also was at least one illicit video of Jane Doe 1, apparently created by Phillips, with another female child that was recovered by police. In that case, authorities also believe the child has been accounted for and is safe.

Phillips, who said he had been a pressman at the Cecil Whig newspaper in Elkton for more than 20 years, pleaded guilty in March to one count each of production of child pornography and possession of child pornography.

"While the volume and content of the images seized in this case was shocking in itself, the defendant's willingness to exploit very young children entrusted to his supervision and care is unconscionable," U.S. Attorney David Weiss said. "The sentence imposed ensures that this defendant will never again victimize a child and sends a clear message to others who would engage in similar conduct."

Driver Alive After His Pickup Is Hit By Train (WILNJ)

By Terri Sanginiti, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

A 30-year-old New Castle area man suffered minor injuries when he ignored flashing lights at a railroad crossing on Del. 9 and his vehicle was hit by a train, police said.

The 10:15 a.m. crash shut down Del. 9 south of Del. 141 in both directions for nearly two hours, New Castle City police Lt. Adam Brams said.

Jarrod Penn, of the 100 block of Covington Place, was driving a Ford F-150 north on Del. 9 approaching the railroad tracks, when he drove over them and was hit by the train.

His truck was mangled and overturned, but Penn managed to get out, Brams said.

He was treated on the scene by county paramedics for abrasions to his head, and injuries to his chest and abdomen, county paramedic Assistant Chief Richard D. Krett said.

He was listed in stable condition.

Witnesses told police the Norfolk Southern train was blowing its whistle as it approached the road at 20-30 mph. The engineer told police the lights were flashing, but that has not been confirmed by witnesses.

Penn was cited for disregarding a traffic control device.

Police Investigate Two Newark Heists (WILNJ)

By Ira Porter, The News Journal

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Newark police are investigating two robberies that occurred within hours of each other.

The first took place Tuesday at 8:15 p.m. in the Cherry Hill Manor neighborhood, off Barksdale Road. An 18-year-old man and a 19-year-old woman were walking near Nathan Hale and Ethan Allen courts when a man ran up. He put a gun to the 18-year-old's head, forced him to the ground and took money from his pockets, police said. He briefly pointed the gun at the woman before running.

No description was provided except that the man wore a dark hooded jacket or sweat shirt and was 6 feet tall.

The second robbery involved a University of Delaware student on Prospect Avenue early Wednesday morning.

Shortly after 2:30 a.m., the 21-year-old victim parked his car and was walking to a friend's house when he noticed he was being followed. Police said he ran to the porch of his friend's home and while he was waiting to be let in, the thief approached him, stuck a sharp object in his back and demanded money. The student then hit the thief on the head and ran toward nearby Wilbur Street.

The victim noticed a wrench in the assailant's hand as he ran off, police said.

The thief was described as in his mid-20s, 6 feet tall, with an average build and facial hair. He wore a white hooded sweat shirt, a tan zippered jacket with tan, brown and white stripes down the sleeves, blue polyester shorts and white sneakers.

Police do not think the robberies are related.

Anyone with information about either case is asked to contact Detective Michael Watson at 366-7110, ext. 133, or e-mail michael.watson@-cj.state.de.us. Anonymous tips can be sent to Crime Stoppers at (800) TIP-3333.

N.J. Man Says His Life Ruined By Link To Prostitutes' Slayings (WILNJ/AP)

By Wayne Parry, Associated Press

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP, N.J. -- "We know you did it."

That's what investigators told Terry Oleson, convinced he was the person who killed four prostitutes and left them face-down in a drainage ditch just outside Atlantic City.

Three years and three DNA samples later, Oleson hasn't been charged. Neither has anyone else in the case, which illuminated the seedy side of the nation's second-largest gambling market.

Friday is the third anniversary of the discovery of the bodies. As families of the victims grieve, Oleson also struggles. He hears whispers, gets strange looks and recently learned of the suspicion from the parents whose children play at his sister's house.

"It's ruined my life," the 37-year-old Salem County handyman said this week. "It's definitely there. I get people looking at me all the time: 'Oh, that's the guy from TV!'

"They didn't charge anybody, but they sure the hell made it look like I was the one," he said.

Oleson denies having anything to do with the killings of Barbara Breidor, Molly Jean Dilts, Kim Raffo and Tracy Ann Roberts, a former resident of Delaware, and said he hopes the killer will be caught.

Prosecutors never publicly labeled Oleson a suspect in the case, but investigators did question him extensively shortly after the bodies were found on Nov. 20, 2006, following a number of troubling leads.

He had been staying in the Golden Key Motel in Egg Harbor Township just before the bodies were discovered behind it. Authorities later discovered a network of hidden cameras in his Alloway Township home, and he admitted using them to secretly record his then-girlfriend's 15-year-old daughter in various states of undress.

After seven hours of questioning that began innocuously enough, Oleson said the tone abruptly changed. He says one of them told him, "We know you did it."

"I thought, 'Man, you guys are really friggin' stupid,'" Oleson said.

He was arrested four days later on an invasion-of-privacy charge, and came home to find that authorities had ransacked his house looking for evidence.

It didn't help that an acknowledged prostitute told police -- and any reporter who would listen -- that Oleson confessed to her that he had killed several women. She later recanted at a news conference and apologized to him.

A judge in the videotaping case commented that bail should be high, noting that "a suspect or person of interest in four homicides" is a flight risk. The same judge months later said in court that those circumstances no longer existed.

Oleson served six months in jail for the videotaping and apologized to the victim.

Before he was sentenced, Oleson gave authorities three DNA samples, hoping it would prove his innocence in the prostitute deaths case.

"The very first time I met this guy at the jail, he offered to take a lie-detector test, and give a DNA sample," said his attorney, James Leonard Jr. "I thought, 'Either this guy is the dumbest serial killer in history, or he's totally innocent.' I have no doubt it's the latter."

Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel told the Associated Press last year that DNA evidence can degrade to the point of being unusable after being in the water for a prolonged period. The victims had all been in the water for several days or more before being discovered.

Housel said in a statement Wednesday that his office is still actively pursuing the case, and has recently assigned more investigators to look into the killings.

He would not answer specific questions about Oleson or any other aspect of the case.

Hugh Auslander, Raffo's husband, said he has not heard anything about the case from authorities in the past year.

"I don't think they have anything at all," he said. "This has caused nothing but misery for me, so I'm trying to just move on with my life at this point."

Auslander said he's not sure what to make of Oleson and doesn't know whether to suspect him any longer.

"After Terry Oleson, everything just fell apart," he said.

Relatives of the other three victims did not respond to interview requests.

Years-old documentaries on the case are still shown on cable TV, and Oleson says they still cause him problems.

His next-door neighbor works with his sister, and their children play together in each other's houses.

"Three weeks ago, that thing was back on TV, and the next day the kid comes over and says, 'Mom says the door has to be open while I'm over here playing,' " Oleson said. "The kid still has to check in every half-hour now."

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL EDITORIALS

China's Clear, Tough Message: Clean Up Your Financial Mess (WILNJ)

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

Americans should take a closer look at what Chinese leaders signaled to President Barack Obama on his trip to Asia this week. In some friendly (and some not-so-friendly) ways, the United States was told to get its financial house in order. Despite the talk of friendship, the Chinese were letting the United States know they do not approve of our current economic policy.

We have to realize that the United States is at an enormous disadvantage when it comes to China. China is America's largest creditor. As one economist put it, "never before has the United States relied so heavily on another country's government for financing."

China holds about $1.5 trillion in U.S. debt. That's up from less than $100 billion at the beginning of 2001. Holding that much debt makes the Chinese worry about the debt's value and about the U.S. system as a whole. China has changed from buying long-term Treasury notes to short-term notes. That is seen as a sign that the Chinese fear U.S. inflation, a development that would help America pay its bills in inflated dollars.

In addition, China's financial officials are beginning to lecture Americans about the fall of the dollar and the rising deficit. China's chief banking regulator criticized the United States for its low interest rates, because the continued borrowing could drive down the debt's value, leading to more strain on trade. The Chinese have even used the president's trip to question the United States' ability to pay for its health care reform.

President Obama urged the Chinese government to allow the yuan to rise, a move that would help the U.S. debt. America and other countries believe the Chinese are manipulating their currency, holding down its buying power. But the Chinese, because they now can, ignored the president.

We can expect worse in the future until we clean up our financial mess.

Such Galling Waste Requires Vigilance In Tracking Spending (WILNJ)

Wilmington News Journal, November 19, 2009

At first read, it seems like such a paltry figure. In all, about 5 percent of federal spending this fiscal year was improper.

But percentages fail to depict the true cost of waste: The federal government spent more than $98 billion improperly, much of it on questionable claims for tax credits and Medicare benefits. Even in non-recessionary times, that picture is absolutely intolerable. More unacceptable is the $26 billion increase in improper payments the previous year.

Unfortunately, government waste has become a normal expenditure of the federal budget. The hair wringing, which heightens during election season, has done little to curb this disrespect of the taxpayer's trust.

Sen. Tom Carper thinks the numbers released Tuesday may be just the tip of the iceberg, because they are based on estimates for several programs, such as Medicare's prescription drug plan. He's right -- most of private industry would never tolerate such losses, with or without deficits. Nor should we.

Next week President Barack Obama plans to sign an executive order to eliminate the squandering, fraud and waste in government spending.

Federal agencies will have to maintain a Web site that tracks improper payments, error rates and outstanding payments. Directors of agencies who don't meet targets to reduce the error rates for two years in a row will have to begin reporting to the Office of Management and Budget. Penalties on government contractors who get payments they haven't earned will be used as incentives to get the money returned.

Here's hoping this new level of fiscal transparency meets a better end than similar promises by this administration to provide a government that is opened and accountable to taxpayers.

BIDEN IN THE NEWS

Senate Health Plan Seeks To Add Coverage To 31 Million (NYT)

By Robert Pear And David M. Herszenhorn

New York Times, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON - Democratic leaders in the Senate unveiled their proposal on Wednesday for overhauling the health care system, outlining legislation that they said would cover most of the uninsured while reducing the federal budget deficit.

Mr. Reid walked into a meeting on the health care bill.

Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, said at an evening news conference that the legislation, which represents President Obama's signature domestic initiative and will be subject to lengthy and heated debate on the Senate floor, would impose new regulations on insurers, extend coverage to 31 million people who currently do not have any and add new benefits to Medicare.

And he said the bill, despite having a price tag of $849 billion over 10 years, would still reduce projected budget deficits by $127 billion over a decade because the costs would be more than offset by new taxes and reductions in government spending, particularly on Medicare.

Democrats expressed confidence that they would have the votes necessary to move forward when the legislation hits its first test in the Senate, probably on Saturday, in the form of a procedural hurdle that will require a united front from all 58 Democrats and the two independents aligned with them.

In one last touch on Wednesday, Mr. Reid and his aides finally named their 2,074-page bill: the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Mr. Reid wrote the legislation in the last several weeks, combining parts of two previous bills adopted by Senate committees. The House passed its version of the health care legislation earlier this month.

Calling the bill "impressive," the White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, said: "This legislation meets the president's objectives, provides protection from insurance companies, contains true cost controls and extends coverage to working families."

"We all know that this legislation is tremendously important," Mr. Reid said at the news conference. "Why? Because it saves lives, it saves money."

The measure includes a government-run insurance plan, or public option, with a provision allowing states to opt out.

Though broadly similar to the bill adopted by the House, Mr. Reid's bill differs in important ways.

Democrats said that it would increase the Medicare payroll tax on high-income people and would impose a new excise tax on high-cost "Cadillac" health plans offered by employers to their employees.

The Medicare payroll tax would rise to 1.95 percent from 1.45 percent for couples earning more than $250,000 a year, and individuals earning more than $200,000, Democrats said. The increase would raise $54 billion over 10 years.

The tax on so-called Cadillac plans, first proposed by the Senate Finance Committee, would apply to individual insurance policies costing more than $8,500 and family plans costing more than $23,000, raising $149 billion toward the cost of the bill. Mr. Reid's proposal scales back the tax on Cadillac plans proposed by the Finance Committee.

Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Democrat, said an important procedural vote to begin debate on the legislation would most likely take place on Saturday, before senators leave town for a weeklong Thanksgiving break.

Mr. Durbin also challenged the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, to post the Republican version of health care legislation on the Internet. Senate Republicans said they would fight the

Democrats' bill at every turn, but they have also said they have no intention of offering a full alternative bill.

Republicans promised a fierce floor fight, including a raft of amendments.

"It's going to be a holy war," said Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Republican of Utah, who is one of his party's most respected voices on health policy but for the last several months has voiced nothing but fury over the Democrats' efforts.

Senate Democratic leaders spent much of Wednesday still trying frantically to nail down the final votes needed to begin debate on the legislation.

At least two potential Democratic holdouts, Senator Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana and Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska, signaled on Wednesday that they were open to supporting a motion to begin debate.

But Mr. Nelson emerged from the Democratic caucus meeting saying he still had not made up his mind. "I still don't have anything that I want to say because I have not had a chance to review the bill, and I only would be going on the basis of outline and that's not enough information," he said.

Senator Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas is the third Democrat who has not made a commitment to moving the bill ahead.

If the Democrats succeed in pulling together the needed votes, the Senate intends to devote most of December to a rollicking, unpredictable debate that could determine the fate of legislation that Mr. Obama has declared to be his top domestic priority.

Vice President Joseph R. **Biden** Jr. and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, both former senators, were on Capitol Hill on Wednesday, trying to help Mr. Reid round up votes.

Several Democratic senators emerged from the meeting saying that Mr. Reid had made substantial improvements in combining two versions of health care legislation, one passed by the health committee in July and another by the Finance Committee in October.

"He really did an exceptionally good job," said Senator Kent Conrad, Democrat of North Dakota, who is a lead author of the Finance Committee bill. Mr. Conrad, who is the chairman of the Budget Committee, noted that Mr. Reid's bill would reduce future federal deficits more than the House-passed bill or the earlier Senate measures.

"I would give Leader Reid very high marks," he said.

Mr. Reid's bill would not go as far as the House-passed bill in limiting insurance coverage for abortions. Democratic senators said that the bill seeks to extend current law by barring the use of federal money for abortions. But it would also require that at least one insurance plan that covers abortion and one that does not cover abortion be offered in every state.

In seeking to broadly expand health coverage, Mr. Reid's bill would require people to obtain health insurance. Senators said that the bill would impose a complicated set of penalties for people who fail to meet the requirement.

Mr. Reid's bill would create a voluntary federal program to provide long-term care insurance and cash benefits to people with severe disabilities. The program, known as Community Living Assistance Services and Supports, would be financed with premiums.

The premiums would be set to cover the full cost of the benefits, which, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would average $75 a day. The House-passed bill includes similar provisions.

Carl Hulse contributed reporting.

Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (NYT/AP)

By The Associated Press

New York Times, November 19, 2009

Filed at 9:37 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Setting up a historic year-end health care debate, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled long-awaited legislation Wednesday night to extend coverage to all but 6 percent of eligible Americans and bar private industry from denying insurance because of pre-existing medical conditions.

The Democrat's $849 billion measure is designed to remake the nation's health care system, relying on cuts in future Medicare spending to cover costs -- as well as on higher payroll taxes for the well-to-do and a new levy on patients undergoing elective cosmetic surgery.

Aides said the mammoth, 2,074-page bill would reduce deficits by $127 billion over a decade and by as much as $650 billion in the 10 years that follow, citing as-yet-unreleased estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.

"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey," said Nevada Sen. Reid, less than two weeks after the House approved its version of a sweeping remake of the health care system-- and nearly 10 months after President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day summons to action.

Obama welcomed Reid's action, saying, "Today, thanks to the Senate's hard work, we're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems. I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible." There was no mention of Obama's longtime goal of signing legislation by year's end.

Republicans vowed a protracted struggle to block the legislation and deny the president a victory that would cap a tumultuous first year in office.

"This bill has been behind closed doors for weeks," said Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader. "Now, it's America's turn, and this will not be a short debate. Higher premiums, tax increases and Medicare cuts to pay for more government. The American people know that is not reform."

An early showdown on the Senate floor is expected by week's end.

Reid's Senate measure would require most Americans to carry health insurance and would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to help those at lower incomes afford it. It also would mandate that large companies to provide coverage to their workers.

Beginning in 2014, it would set up new insurance marketplaces -- called exchanges -- primarily for those who now have a hard time getting or keeping coverage. Consumers would have the choice of purchasing government sold insurance, an attempt to hold down prices charged by private insurers.

After weeks of secretive drafting, Reid outlined the legislation to rank-and-file Democratic senators at a closed-door meeting. "Everyone was positive," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.

That didn't mean there weren't problems -- far from it. At his news conference, Reid pointedly refrained from saying he had the 60 votes necessary to propel the bill over its first hurdle.

Reid met privately earlier in the day with Sens. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, moderate Democrats who have expressed concerns about the measure.

Nelson later issued a statement strongly suggesting he would vote with fellow Democrats on an initial showdown expected within days. Aides have said privately that Reid decided to retain an existing antitrust exemption for the insurance industry as a way of satisfying the Nebraskan's concerns.

Landrieu said, "I'm not going to be for anything that doesn't drive down costs over time."

Lincoln, the only one of the three who faces re-election next year, told reporters, "We'll wait and see."

With the support of two independents, Democrats have 60 seats, the precise number needed to choke off any delaying tactics by the 40 Republicans who appear united in opposition to the bill in its current form.

In general, Reid proposed an outline that is similar to the House-passed bill, but there were important differences.

He called for an increase of a half percentage point in the Medicare payroll tax for individuals with income over $200,000 a year, $250,000 for couples.

He also included a tax on high-value insurance policies, meant to curb the appetite for expensive care.

The House bill contains neither of those two provisions, relying on an income tax surcharge on the wealthy to finance an expansion of coverage.

Reid's measure also calls for hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in future Medicare spending, an attempt to satisfy Obama's call to curtail the growth of health care spending that is fiercely opposed by Republicans.

On another controversial issue, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., told reporters Reid had decided to require the side-by-side sale of insurance policies that cover abortion services and do not, an attempt to satisfy both sides. That is far less restrictive than a House-passed provision that left liberal Democrats angry.

Ahead lie weeks -- if not more -- of unpredictable maneuvering on the Senate floor, where Reid and his allies will seek to incorporate changes sought by Democrats and repel attempts by Republicans to defeat the legislation and inflict a significant political defeat on the president.

Reid released his legislation more than a week after the House approved its version of the health care bill on a near party-line vote of 220-215.

According to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, that House bill, with a price tag of about $1.2 trillion, would result in coverage for tens of millions of uninsured, and provide 96 percent of the eligible population with insurance.

Two Senate committees approved different versions earlier in the year, and while Reid has said he would produce a blend of the two proposals, in fact he had a virtual free hand to come up with a plan that could command the 60 votes needed to pass.

Anticipating a major struggle, the White House deputized Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to join Vice President Joe **Biden** in trying to clear the way for the bill's approval over the next several weeks.

Salazar, a former Colorado senator, is viewed as a bridge to moderate Democrats who are far outnumbered by liberals inside the Democratic caucus.

Daschle was Obama's first choice for secretary of health and human services, a position from which he was to try and oversee the administration's drive to enact health care legislation. He withdrew his nomination when it was disclosed he had not paid more than $120,000 in federal taxes over several years.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Erica Werner contributed to this report.

Senate Health Bill Is Unveiled (WSJ)

Reid Outlines $849 Billion Plan; Tradeoffs Include Stiffer Medicare Tax on High Incomes

By Greg Hitt And Janet Adamy

Wall Street Journal, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, propelling action on President Barack Obama's top domestic priority, unveiled Wednesday a ten-year $849 billion bill that would overhaul the nation's health-care system and extend insurance to 31 million Americans without coverage.

The 2,074-page legislation represents the Nevada Democrat's first attempt to build consensus among Senate Democratic liberals and centrists, as well as the two independents allied with the party.

One swing Democrat, Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, said he still has a range of concerns but suggested he might at least be willing to begin debate. "If you don't like the bill, then why would you block your own opportunity to amend it?" he said. Two other Democrats on the fence, Sen. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, remained noncommittal Wednesday evening.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget office estimated the bill would ensure that 94% of those living in the U.S., not counting unauthorized immigrants, have insurance coverage, several Senate Democratic aides said. CBO previously estimated about 83% of Americans now have insurance.

The Senate measure would reduce the federal budget deficit by $127 billion over the next decade, and by $650 billion over the second ten years of the program. It achieves that in part through a new Medicare payroll tax and a tax on high-value insurance plans.

The $849 billion price tag comes in below the $1.05 trillion cost of the health overhaul passed by the House this month, and the prospect of additional deficit reduction may raise chances fiscally conservative Democrats will back the package. But the figures aren't likely to win over Republicans, who say the bill adds costly new benefits for some Americans when the federal debt is reaching new heights.

Other hurdles to passage in the full Senate include fractures between liberal and conservative Democrats over a government-run insurance plan and disputes over how the bill should treat abortion.

"This is yet another trillion-dollar experiment, but it is not what Americans bargained for," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.).

Among other things, the Senate legislation would create a new government-run health insurance plan to compete with private insurers. States would be allowed the option of not participating, and the plan would negotiate payment rates directly with health-care providers, rather than tying payments to Medicare's low rates. Those were concessions to centrists worried about government's footprint in the private sector.

The bill would also create government subsidies to help individuals and families comply with a mandate to buy insurance, and would sharply expand Medicaid, the federal-state health insurance program for the poor.

Journal Community

discuss

" OK, Mr. Reid. And the tooth fairy is going to leave a million dollars under my pillow tonight. " -Bruce D. Gulick

Mr. Obama said the legislation would help fix the problems of rising insurance premiums, increasing medical costs and the instability felt by those who lack insurance. "We're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems," he said.

Mr. Reid huddled with Democrats for weeks to hammer out details of the bill, and his decision to move forward Wednesday sets the stage for a pivotal vote, perhaps Friday or Saturday, that will determine whether the Senate can formally open debate on the bill.

"Tonight represents the last leg of this journey we've been on for a while now," Mr. Reid said. He met Wednesday with Vice President Joe **Biden**, and many Democrats voiced hope the majority leader will be able to secure the votes needed to overcome Republican opposition and move to the debate.

"We're going to clear the hurdles," said Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic standard-bearer in 2004. But the outcome remains uncertain. "I'm not going to assume a single vote," said Illinois Sen. Richard Durbin, the Democratic whip.

The coming showdown looms as the first of several votes over the next month that will test Mr. Reid's ability to hold together liberals and centrists. Republicans contend Democrats are trying to rush action on the bill before the American public, already uneasy, turns completely against the White House-backed initiative.

On the floor, there could be at least a half-dozen points where Republicans-if they use every stalling tactic available-could force Mr. Reid to muster 60 votes to move the bill along, said congressional aides.

Mr. Reid decided to pare back a proposed tax on high-value insurance plans, bowing to liberal and union complaints that the measure would hit middle-class families. Under his proposal, the tax would fall on plans valued at more than $23,000 for couples, up from $21,000 in legislation written by the Senate Finance Committee. The tax was estimated to raise $149 billion over ten years, far less than was envisioned earlier this year.

To help make up for the lost revenue, Mr. Reid inserted a provision that would raise Medicare payroll taxes on couples with income of more than $250,000 a year. For those families, the levy would be raised to 1.95%, up from 1.45%. Overall, the proposal would bring in $54 billion over ten years. Mr. Reid is also proposing a new tax on elective cosmetic surgery, generating $5 billion.

Both the House and Senate bills make hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in spending on Medicare. But the two chambers differ on how to raise revenue. The House legislation relies largely on an income surtax on the wealthy. The Senate bill would raise money across a range of health care sources.

Insurers and drug companies, for example, would be hit with tens of billions in new fees. So would medical device makers, though the proposed levy on device makers was lowered to $20 billion, down about half from the Senate Finance Committee bill.

Still to be fought out on the Senate floor is the issue of abortion.

The Senate bill provides wider insurance coverage for abortion than the House legislation. Among other things, the Senate's proposal would allow women who receive government subsidies to buy insurance to enroll in a plan that covers abortion, while the House bill would bar that. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R., Utah) said he wanted to force the Senate to vote on whether to adopt the House limits. "We'll have a major debate," he said.

Write to Greg Hitt at greg.hitt@wsj.com and Janet Adamy at janet.adamy@wsj.com

Reid Bill Will Cost $849 Billion (POL)

By Carrie Budoff Brown And Manu Raju

Politico, November 19, 2009

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid scrambled Wednesday to pull together 60 votes for his health reform bill - and his effort got a boost from congressional scorekeepers, who said his plan would cost $849 billion over 10 years, comfortably below the president's $900 billion limit.

The Congressional Budget Office also gave Reid some good news on the deficit - saying his plan would reduce the deficit by $127 billion in deficit reduction in the first 10 years and $650 billion in the second decade. It would cover 94 percent of all Americans.

Reid was briefing the Democratic caucus on details of his bill at 5 p.m. and it's expected to include a public option, with a chance for states to opt-out of coverage; a mandate requiring individuals to own insurance; and subsidies to help low- and middle-income Americans buy coverage.

Now Reid must hope moderate Democrats who hold the key to reform will agree to go ahead with a key test vote on the bill as early as Saturday, and Reid spent the day Wednesday wooing these fence-sitters.

But he got some positive soundings from centrist Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson, who put out a news release to remind voters that a vote to go ahead with debate on the bill Saturday doesn't equate to a vote in support of the bill. It seemed an indication that Nelson was willing to give Reid his vote on the motion to start debate.

Getting those 60 votes on what amounts to a procedural vote, however, has proven challenging for Reid, with two other key moderates, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, still not on record committing to vote for proceeding to debate.

At around 2:15 p.m., the three moderate Democratic holdouts - Nelson, Landrieu and Lincoln - entered Reid's office for a briefing.

"He is walking through the particulars with them," said Reid's spokesman, Jim Manley. "We need 60 votes to get this bill to the floor."

Vice President **Biden** held court for more than three hours in a room off the Senate floor. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle were also dispatched to the Capitol by President Barack Obama to lobby senators.

As expected, moderates were the focal point. Salazar ate lunch with Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) in the Senate dining room. Lincoln (D-Ark.) hustled into the Senate reception room for a sitdown with **Biden**, but she emerged without making any public commitments.

"We're still counting. Harry is still counting and working," Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).

Adding to the uncertainty Wednesday was the absence of Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who flew back to Montana to deal with a family emergency. With no margin for error, Reid needs Baucus present for the first vote.

Durbin said he was hopeful Baucus would return for the vote.

Reid said Tuesday that he is "cautiously optimistic" he can secure the 60 votes he needs to move forward on the bill by this weekend. Reid's bill is expected to include a national government insurance plan with a provision for states to opt out. Reid is also expected to adjust a 40 percent excise tax on high-value insurance plans by raising the threshold at which insurers would pay the fee. He's expected to make up for that lost revenue by proposing an expansion of the Medicare payroll tax.

Reid Plan Ups Pressure On Moderates (POL)

By Carrie Budoff Brown

Politico, November 19, 2009

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled his $849 billion health reform bill Wednesday to broad support from fellow Democrats - and the move quickly turned up the pressure on the last few wavering moderates to support the plan, which includes a sizable chunk of deficit cutting.

Reid's plan would expand coverage to 94 percent of Americans through a government-run health insurance option - allowing states to opt out - and other features, all while reducing future federal deficits by $127 billion over the next 10 years, according to Senate aides briefed by the Congressional Budget Office.

"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey" to bring health reform to the nation, Reid said in announcing the bill.

But Reid's plan contains considerable differences from House legislation passed earlier this month - with a more limited public option and different ways to pay for the bill. Reid included an excise tax on insurers who offer "Cadillac" health plans, not the "millionaire's tax" that's in the House bill.

And one of the biggest differences between the bills - on language restricting federal funding for abortion - could prove problematic for Reid. His bill doesn't include as many limits as the House bill and already is drawing fire from anti-abortion activists.

Democrats on Wednesday were clearly hoping that the deficit figures - the biggest deficit reduction of any health bill to date, Reid's office noted - would knock down one of the last remaining obstacles to winning the votes of key centrists, at least to go ahead with debate on the bill as early as this weekend. Reid's office said the bill could reduce the deficit by $650 billion in its second 10 years.

And, in fact, the strategy seemed to be working. Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson and Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu both sounded more positive about voting to allow debate to proceed.

Nelson told reporters he still had problems with the public option plan - he prefers a plan that would allow states to opt in instead - but signaled he'd wage that fight on the floor. He also made clear the vote to allow debate wouldn't be the final fight on the bill.

"There will be opportunities to amend the legislation, and if it is amended to the satisfaction of several people, then it will have enough votes to pass on the back end," Nelson said. "If not, it won't. That is the risk."

Other centrists sounded positive toward the bill. "If the bottom line is what it appears to be, that's an encouraging thing. ... But you've got to trust but verify," said Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), who said he would vote to allow debate.

One holdout appeared to be Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, who faces a tough reelection fight next fall. On her way in to the briefing with Reid, Lincoln was asked how she will vote on the motion to proceed: "We'll wait and see," she said.

Reid's hopes of calling a vote to proceed with debate as early as Friday seemed to fade, but a Saturday vote remained a possibility. But he has no margin for error, needing all 58 Democrats and two independents to block any move toward a filibuster and bring the bill to the floor.

And over the course of Wednesday, the announcement of the plan emerged as a key test of his leadership and vote-corralling abilities - with President Barack Obama dispatching Vice President Joe **Biden** back to his old Senate haunts to help.

Adding to the uncertainty Wednesday was the absence of Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, who flew back to Montana to deal with a family emergency.

Beyond the moderates, Democrats praised Reid's effort to thread the needle with a bill that will keep costs lower than Obama's target of $900 billion, reins in deficit spending and still expands coverage to

more than 31 million Americans. The reimbursement rates for the public plan will not be tied to Medicare, and co-ops will still be offered.

As for the $650 billion estimate, it grows out of a calculation by the CBO that the Senate Finance Committee bill would reduce the deficit by one-fourth to one-half percent of gross domestic product over its second 10 years. Finance Committee officials converted that to $650 billion to $1.3 trillion, and Reid's office believes his bill to be in the one-fourth range and maybe higher - leading to the claim of $650 billion.

The Senate bill pushes back implementation of major parts of reform to 2014 -- a shift from both the House and the Senate Finance Committee bill, which created 2013 effective dates.

This is bad news for lawmakers who will need to explain to constituents why the elements that have attracted the most attention -- the public plan, the Medicaid expansion and the insurance exchanges -- won't be available for four years. Some reforms would kick in earlier, Senate aides explained, but the big pieces would still be a ways off.

Reid sought to sidestep hot-button issues that could cause trouble for the bill. Illegal immigrants will not get health benefits under the bill, and it would restrict taxpayer funding of abortion - an issue that almost derailed the House bill.

Abortion rights supporters were quick to praise the language Reid included in the bill, which was an early warning sign that it doesn't go far enough for some in the anti-abortion community who led the effort to amend the House bill.

The National Right to Life Committee slammed the language as "unacceptable."

"Reid seeks to cover elective abortions in two big new federal health programs, but tries to conceal that unpopular reality with layers of contrived definitions and hollow bookkeeping requirements," NRLC Legislative Director Douglas Johnson said in a statement.

Other Democrats praised Reid's efforts.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass), who was concerned about the tax on Cadillac benefits, praised Reid for raising the limits to policies costing $23,000 for a family and $8,500 for an individual. "They moved, and I like the new numbers. It is closer to where I first began. ... I think we are going pass this legislation."

Kerry also praised Reid's efforts to reduce the tax on medical device manufacturers to $20 billion, down from $40 billion, over 10 years.

The Reid bill would increase the Medicare payroll tax on couples who earn more than $250,000 and individuals that earn $200,000 from 1.45 percent to 1.95 percent.

The bill levies a 5 percent tax on elective cosmetic surgery. The provision raises $5 billion and was needed to make the numbers work, a Democratic Senate aide said. The Finance Committee considered the tax but dismissed it, in part because it was a public relations battle that senators were not willing to wage.

The Senate bill includes a public insurance option that allows states to choose not to participate. In order to opt-out, states would have to pass a law, the aide said.

The Reid bill only slightly toughens the requirement that people carry insurance. It levies a $95 fine in 2014 and scales up to $750 by 2016. The Senate Finance bill had no penalty in the first year.

Critics worry that people will choose to pay the cheaper penalty rather than buying the more expensive insurance plans because the bill also requires insurers to offer coverage to people who are sick. That combination could lead to an older, sicker and more expensive risk pool.

In what can be viewed as an election-year sweetener for senior citizens, the coverage gap in the Medicare prescription drug program would shrink by $500 in 2010 only under the Senate bill. The Senate

aide described it as a "down-payment" that would move the Senate closer to the House bill, which eliminates the donut hole over the next decade.

Getting 60 votes on what amounts to a procedural vote has proved challenging for Reid. **Biden** held court for more than three hours in a room off the Senate floor. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle were also dispatched to the Capitol by Obama to lobby senators.

As expected, moderates were the focal point. Salazar ate lunch with Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) in the Senate dining room. Lincoln hustled into the Senate reception room for a sit-down with **Biden**, but she emerged without making any public commitments.

"We're still counting. Harry is still counting and working," said Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).

Manu Raju, Patrick O'Connor, Chris Frates and Jake Sherman contributed to this story.

Be a part of the daily political debate with PROJECT POLITICO powered by YouTube. Click here to submit your video now and be featured on POLITICO.com.

Senate's $849 Billion Health Bill Widens Coverage, Cuts Deficit (BLOOM)

By Laura Litvan And Nicole Gaouette

Bloomberg News, November 19, 2009

Nov. 18 (Bloomberg) -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid released an $849 billion health-care plan that calls for new government competition for private insurers, covers almost all Americans and raises Medicare taxes on the wealthiest people.

Reid's proposal, the most sweeping overhaul of the U.S. health system in four decades, cleared a major hurdle when the Congressional Budget Office said it would cut the federal budget deficit by $127 billion in the first decade. That met a standard set by President Barack Obama and allows Reid to seek a vote as early as Saturday to open the way for Senate debate.

The 2,074-page Senate bill would extend coverage to 94 percent of Americans or some 31 million people, lawmakers said. The House already passed its version on a vote of 220-215 on Nov. 7.

"This legislation is a tremendous step forward," Reid told reporters at the Capitol. "Tonight begins the last leg of this journey."

The measure is intended to both reduce the ranks of the uninsured and curb rising medical costs. Both the House and Senate versions require that Americans get health coverage or pay a penalty, set up online insurance-purchasing exchanges and offer government aid to help lower-income people.

The Senate legislation would reduce the deficit by $650 billion in the second decade, according to preliminary estimates from the nonpartisan CBO cited by lawmakers.

'Good Deal'

Reid is trying to jump-start legislation, which Obama has said he wants to sign into law this year. Reid has cast doubt on that goal after months of setbacks and signs the Republicans want to prolong the debate by using delaying tactics.

"We're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems," Obama said in a statement released by the White House. "I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible."

Reid included a so-called public option program to compete with private insurers such as Hartford, Connecticut-based Aetna Inc. even though it's opposed by all Senate Republicans and some Democrats. He's gambling he can get support to start debate on a bill that's likely to be rewritten by the full Senate.

While the House opted for an income surtax on the wealthiest Americans, much of the funding for the Senate bill will come from a tax on high-end, Cadillac insurance plans, said Senator Kent Conrad, a North Dakota Democrat.

New Taxes

The Cadillac tax would be placed on insurers that offer plans valued at $8,500 for individuals or $23,000 for families, Conrad told reporters. It would have higher thresholds for high- risk workers and people living in states with costlier premiums, Conrad said.

Reid did settle on a Medicare tax increase for some Americans, raising the rate to 1.95 percent from 1.45 percent for couples earning more than $250,000, Conrad said. He also plans a new commission to help set rates paid by Medicare, the government program for the elderly, Conrad said.

The Senate's requirement for employers is also different. Under Reid's bill, companies with 50 or more workers would be subject to penalties if they don't provide coverage and have workers who get taxpayer funded subsidies to buy policies.

'Class Act'

The Senate bill includes a federally run long-term care insurance plan dubbed the "Class Act" that would let workers pay premiums and then get a cash benefit later for adult day care or assisted living expenses, lawmakers said. It would also bar insurers from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions, and would expand Medicare prescription-drug coverage.

Reid, a Nevada Democrat, has been melding plans passed by the Senate health and finance committees and still faces splits in his party over issues including how to pay for the bill, whether to set up a public option, and how to ensure that federal funds aren't used for abortions.

One of the top Democrats involved in the overhaul effort, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, may be missing the next few days. Baucus flew back to his home state of Montana to be with his ailing mother.

"We'll get him back here when we need him," Reid said.

New York Senator Chuck Schumer, one of the Democratic leaders, told reporters "everything looks good" for an initial vote to start debate. At least three Democrats --Senators Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas -- had refused to pledge their votes for that step until they could review the bill's text.

'Not Enough'

The bill "is better in some ways than in other ways," Nelson said tonight. "Until I have a chance to go through it, a brief explanation is not enough" to make a conclusion, he said.

Reid met with the three senators this afternoon and got some help from Vice President Joe **Biden**, who went to Capitol Hill to lobby other senators on the bill. Former senators Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar who now serves as President Barack Obama's Interior Secretary, also met with lawmakers.

To win passage, Reid has to keep all 60 votes controlled by Democrats together. Besides Nelson, Landrieu and Lincoln, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman has been critical of the public option. Lieberman, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, said he would support the vote to start debate and work with lawmakers to strip out the government program.

Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, the only Republican to vote for a health-care plan in the committee phase, said she can't support a public option. She's pushing for a trigger to put a government plan in effect only if there is evidence that policies offered by private insurers are unaffordable.

Time for Debate

Senator Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican, today said it's doubtful any Republican will vote for Reid's plan. He also said Reid should allow enough time for debate.

"We're talking about one-sixth of the economy," Hatch said. "This should be a very deliberative process. And it should take more than a month and a half."

Reid has safeguards to keep federal dollars from funding abortion, though not the restrictions adopted in the House, lawmakers said. Abortion rights supporters have threatened to vote against a final bill if it contains the House language and have been working to keep it out of the Senate version.

If the Senate passes legislation, it would work with the House to come up with compromise legislation for a new round of votes in both chambers before a bill would go to Obama.

"We are now down to the week we have been waiting for," Massachusetts Senator John Kerry told reporters tonight. "This is not just a matter of months in the waiting, this has been decades in the waiting."

To contact the reporters on this story: Laura Litvan in Washington at llitvan@bloomberg.net; Nicole Gaouette in Washington at ngaouette@bloomberg.net

Reid Pushes Holdouts To Vote For Health Bill Debate (Update2) (BLOOM)

By Laura Litvan And Kristin Jensen

Bloomberg News, November 19, 2009

Nov. 18 (Bloomberg) -- Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid plans to give fellow Democrats details of his proposal to overhaul U.S. health care even as lawmakers raise concerns over issues from abortion to a government-run insurance program.

Reid will meet with Senate Democrats at 5 p.m. Washington time and deliver a summary, North Dakota Senator Kent Conrad said. The next step is the push to begin debate on the bill, which would require several procedural steps and corralling 60 votes to overcome efforts to block action.

"I feel cautiously optimistic that we can do that," Reid said yesterday.

To keep the 60 votes controlled by Democrats in line, Reid is enlisting the support of former senators including Vice President Joe **Biden**, who went to Capitol Hill today. Former Senators Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar, who now serves as President Barack Obama's interior secretary, also met with lawmakers.

The legislation, Obama's top domestic priority, is intended to cover tens of millions of uninsured Americans while curbing medical costs. The proposals for purchasing exchanges, subsidies and a requirement that all Americans have coverage would cost more than $800 billion over 10 years and mark the biggest changes to U.S. health care in more than four decades.

'Still Counting'

The House passed its version on a 220-215 vote on Nov. 7. Reid has been waiting for Congressional Budget Office analyses on various proposals drawn up by the Senate health and finance committees before unveiling his plan.

Senator Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat and chairman of the health committee, said the CBO found the cost of "coverage" in the legislation is less than $900 billion. He didn't elaborate. House leaders initially put the cost of their $1.05 trillion bill at $894 billion, a net figure that took into account new revenue such as penalties for not buying insurance.

Reid is "still counting" members and plans to hold a vote on the motion to proceed to debate before the Thanksgiving holiday recess planned for next week, said Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat. The Senate might be in session on both days of the coming weekend, Durbin said.

Baucus Leaves

One of the top Democrats involved in the health-care overhaul, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, may be missing the next few days. Baucus flew back to his home state of Montana to be with his ailing mother, a congressional aide said. The aide said it wouldn't affect the timing of the bill.

A Senate aide familiar with Reid's proposal said the plan will likely include the creation of a federally run long-term care insurance plan dubbed the "Class Act" by its original sponsors, the late Senator Edward Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, and former Senator Michael DeWine, an Ohio Republican.

Under the plan, participating employers would let workers pay premiums into the program, which would offer a cash benefit of between $50 and $75 per day that could be used to pay for adult day care or assisted living expenses. Workers would pay into the plan for five years before receiving benefits.

The idea has drawn critics, who say its success would depend on a growing roster of new premium contributors. Conrad, who is chairman of the budget committee, called the Class Act "a Ponzi scheme of the first order," in an Oct. 27 Washington Post article.

Letter From Economists

The White House weighed in on the legislation last night, releasing a letter sent by 23 economists that outlined four priorities the Senate bill should include.

The economists said the bill should impose an excise tax on high-cost insurance plans; not increase the deficit; set up an independent commission to make binding recommendations on Medicare cuts, and carry out "delivery-system reforms," which would reward health-care providers for "providing better care, not just more care."

Including those elements "will reduce long-term deficits, improve the quality of care, and put the nation on a firm fiscal footing," wrote the economists, who included Princeton University Professors Alan Blinder and Uwe Reinhardt and former Federal Reserve Vice Chairman Alice Rivlin.

While Democrats control 60 Senate votes, Reid can't yet count on them to clear the way for debate.

'Competition-Free Zone'

One Democrat, Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, said his support for proceeding is in doubt unless the government-run insurance program, or public option, is included in the plan.

"I'm not going to support a bill that's a competition- free zone," Wyden told reporters yesterday.

And at least three Democrats -- Senators Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas -- have refused to pledge their votes until they have seen the bill's text.

Reid met with the three senators this afternoon to go over the details of what's in the bill before he introduces it, said Reid spokesman Jim Manley. The first big test vote for the measure may come as early as Nov. 21, Manley said. That would be a vote to end the delaying tactics of opponents who want to bar the measure from getting to the floor for consideration.

One of the most pressing issues for Reid is the public option. Wyden and Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia insist the best way to reduce health costs is to set up the government program to compete with insurers like Hartford, Connecticut-based Aetna Inc.

Carper Compromise

Other Democrats are critical. Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, said he won't vote for a bill that includes the program, though he has said he will support a motion to start debate.

Delaware Senator Tom Carper is crafting a compromise for fellow Democrats that might be offered as a replacement for the public option during floor debate. The "hammer approach" would require states

where insurance plans don't meet affordability standards to offer an alternative, national plan run by a nonprofit, Carper told reporters yesterday.

To contact the reporters on this story: Kristin Jensen in Washington at kjensen@bloomberg.net; Laura Litvan in Washington at llitvan@bloomberg.net

Reid Sets Markers For Historic Health Care Debate (AP)

By David Espo, AP Special Correspondent

Associated Press, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Setting up a historic year-end health care debate, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled long-awaited legislation Wednesday night to extend coverage to all but 6 percent of eligible Americans and bar private industry from denying insurance because of pre-existing medical conditions.

The Democrat's $849 billion measure is designed to remake the nation's health care system, relying on cuts in future Medicare spending to cover costs - as well as on higher payroll taxes for the well-to-do and a new levy on patients undergoing elective cosmetic surgery.

Aides said the mammoth, 2,074-page bill would reduce deficits by $127 billion over a decade and by as much as $650 billion in the 10 years that follow, citing as-yet-unreleased estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.

"Tonight begins the last leg of this journey," said Nevada Sen. Reid, less than two weeks after the House approved its version of a sweeping remake of the health care system- and nearly 10 months after President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day summons to action.

Obama welcomed Reid's action, saying, "Today, thanks to the Senate's hard work, we're closer than ever to enacting solutions to these problems. I look forward to working with the Senate and House to get a finished bill to my desk as soon as possible." There was no mention of Obama's longtime goal of signing legislation by year's end.

Republicans vowed a protracted struggle to block the legislation and deny the president a victory that would cap a tumultuous first year in office.

"This bill has been behind closed doors for weeks," said Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader. "Now, it's America's turn, and this will not be a short debate. Higher premiums, tax increases and Medicare cuts to pay for more government. The American people know that is not reform."

An early showdown on the Senate floor is expected by week's end.

Reid's Senate measure would require most Americans to carry health insurance and would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to help those at lower incomes afford it. Medium and large companies would not be required to offer coverage, but they would be forced to pay fees if the government ended up subsidizing their employees' insurance.

Beginning in 2014, the bill would set up new insurance marketplaces - called exchanges - primarily for those who now have a hard time getting or keeping coverage. Consumers would have the choice of purchasing government sold insurance, an attempt to hold down prices charged by private insurers.

After weeks of secretive drafting, Reid outlined the legislation to rank-and-file Democratic senators at a closed-door meeting. "Everyone was positive," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.

That didn't mean there weren't problems - far from it. At his news conference, Reid pointedly refrained from saying he had the 60 votes necessary to propel the bill over its first hurdle.

Reid met privately earlier in the day with Sens. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, moderate Democrats who have expressed concerns about the measure.

Nelson later issued a statement strongly suggesting he would vote with fellow Democrats on an initial showdown expected within days. Aides have said privately that Reid decided to retain an existing antitrust exemption for the insurance industry as a way of satisfying the Nebraskan's concerns.

Landrieu said, "I'm not going to be for anything that doesn't drive down costs over time."

Lincoln, the only one of the three who faces re-election next year, told reporters, "We'll wait and see."

With the support of two independents, Democrats have 60 seats, the precise number needed to choke off any delaying tactics by the 40 Republicans who appear united in opposition to the bill in its current form.

In general, Reid proposed an outline that is similar to the House-passed bill, but there were important differences.

He called for an increase of a half percentage point in the Medicare payroll tax for individuals with income over $200,000 a year, $250,000 for couples.

He also included a tax on high-value insurance policies, meant to curb the appetite for expensive care.

The House bill contains neither of those two provisions, relying on an income tax surcharge on the wealthy to finance an expansion of coverage.

Reid's measure also calls for hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in future Medicare spending, an attempt to satisfy Obama's call to curtail the growth of health care spending that is fiercely opposed by Republicans.

On another controversial issue, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., told reporters Reid had decided to require the side-by-side sale of insurance policies that cover abortion services and do not, an attempt to satisfy both sides. That is far less restrictive than a House-passed provision that left liberal Democrats angry.

Ahead lie weeks - if not more - of unpredictable maneuvering on the Senate floor, where Reid and his allies will seek to incorporate changes sought by Democrats and repel attempts by Republicans to defeat the legislation and inflict a significant political defeat on the president.

Reid released his legislation more than a week after the House approved its version of the health care bill on a near party-line vote of 220-215.

According to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, that House bill, with a price tag of about $1.2 trillion, would result in coverage for tens of millions of uninsured, and provide 96 percent of the eligible population with insurance.

Two Senate committees approved different versions earlier in the year, and while Reid has said he would produce a blend of the two proposals, in fact he had a virtual free hand to come up with a plan that could command the 60 votes needed to pass.

Anticipating a major struggle, the White House deputized Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to join Vice President Joe **Biden** in trying to clear the way for the bill's approval over the next several weeks.

Salazar, a former Colorado senator, is viewed as a bridge to moderate Democrats who are far outnumbered by liberals inside the Democratic caucus.

Daschle was Obama's first choice for secretary of health and human services, a position from which he was to try and oversee the administration's drive to enact health care legislation. He withdrew his

nomination when it was disclosed he had not paid more than $120,000 in federal taxes over several years.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Erica Werner contributed to this report.

? 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Daschle Is Still Go-to Guy On Healthcare (HILL)

By Alexander Bolton

The Hill, November 19, 2009

Tom Daschle on Wednesday huddled with Vice President **Biden** and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to strategize on healthcare reform, nearly 10 months after his Cabinet nomination crashed and burned.

Reid (D-Nev.) invited Daschle to his office for a meeting with **Biden** as Democrats are scrambling to secure 60 votes to clear a procedural motion on healthcare reform.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who has strong friendships with Democratic centrists such as Sen. Mary Landrieu (La.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.), also attended the meeting.

The former Senate majority leader from South Dakota is unexpectedly at the heart of Washington's highest-level negotiations at a key moment in the movement to reform the nation's healthcare system.

When Daschle withdrew his name from consideration for secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services in February, it appeared that he would fade into the background. The withdrawal came after days of national headlines focusing on the ex-senator's unpaid taxes. Daschle at the time acknowledged he had become a "distraction."

Obama said he "screwed up" in handling Daschle's nomination: "Ultimately, I campaigned on changing Washington and bottom-up politics."

The president added, "And I don't want to send a message to the American people that there are two sets of standards -- one for powerful people and one for ordinary folks who are working every day and paying their taxes."

Daschle announced this week he will be leaving one lobbying firm, Alston & Bird, for another, DLA Piper. The ex-senator has repeatedly stressed he did not lobby for Alston & Bird and will not lobby for DLA Piper, but government watchdogs have noted both firms have many healthcare clients. Daschle's title at DLA Piper will be "senior policy adviser."

Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), who negotiated healthcare legislation with Reid over the last several weeks, told The Hill Wednesday that Daschle has been in frequent contact with members of the upper chamber.

Daschle declined through an assistant a request for an interview.

Daschle is the second major hire with Senate ties DLA Piper has made in recent months. The firm also picked up former Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.) in September.

Francis Burch, the global chairman of DLA Piper, is clearly pleased to have landed Daschle, who is admired by his former colleagues on Capitol Hill.

"Sen. Daschle is a senior statesman and is justifiably regarded as one of the wisest and most effective problem solvers in Washington as well as in the nation and the world," said Burch.

Reid Rolling Out Big Guns To Push Healthcare Bill To 60 Needed Votes (HILL)

By Alexander Bolton

The Hill, November 19, 2009

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has recruited an all-star team of former senators - Vice President Joe **Biden**, Tom Daschle and Ken Salazar - to push healthcare reform over the finish line.

Reid (D-Nev.) plotted strategy with the vice president, Interior Secretary Salazar and former Majority Leader Daschle (D-S.D.) on Wednesday, days ahead of a crucial vote to begin debate on the bill that needs every Democrat.

Reid's all-star team indicates that the administration and Democratic leadership are now using all the persuading power and arm-twisting prowess available to them to carry President Barack Obama's signature agenda item to a successful conclusion.

A handful of Democratic centrists are holding out on the procedural vote, wanting time to read the legislation.

Reid got good news Wednesday when the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reported the measure would spend $849 billion over 10 years to cover 31 million of the uninsured and reduce the federal budget deficit by $127 billion over that time. That's under Obama's spending limit of $900 billion, a concern of many in the middle

Democratic leaders shared the legislation with the conference on Wednesday and then planned to hold a news conference and make the bill public.

"There's not a lot of room for error here," said Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), among those centrists targeted. "I think the administration is pulling out all the stops.

A Democratic aide said **Biden** met with Reid Wednesday morning to offer use of his extensive legislative experience and many friendships in the senate.

"He showed up to say, 'What can I do to help?' " said the aide.

Biden declined to say which senators he chatted with Wednesday.

"I met with a lot of people, anybody who will talk to me," **Biden** said while leaving the Capitol Wednesday afternoon, almost five hours after he arrived.

Biden served 36 years in the Senate and has strong relationships with nearly the entire Democratic Conference.

Salazar, a Democratic senator from Colorado until he joined the administration this year, has close friendships with Landrieu and Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.).

Daschle, a three-term senator, has also served as a colleague with those centrists who are considered the least likely to vote for a healthcare reform bill that includes a government-run insurance program. That group includes Landrieu, Nelson, Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (Conn.), an Independent who caucuses with the Democrats

"Relationships mean a lot around here and Sen. **Biden** has them and Sen. Daschle has them and Salazar has them," said Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), a member of the Senate Finance Committee who helped craft that panel's healthcare bill.

Landrieu suspected Obama may have even asked the three to make the final sales pitch to those on the fence

"They know the senators well, they know the Senate well, they know our rules and the way this is going to have to be negotiated on the floor," said Landrieu, who was scheduled to meet with Salazar on Wednesday.

Landrieu, Nelson and Lincoln met with Reid Wednesday afternoon to discuss their concerns with the legislation.

Landrieu said she was inclined to vote against the motion to begin debate on the legislation but the meeting with Reid mollified some of her concerns.

"I'm in neutral right now," she said. "The meeting helped."

Nelson said his relationship with **Biden** has always been "very solid" and called Salazar "one of my very best friends in the Senate."

Salazar told The Hill: "I will help as needed" on healthcare reform.

"If needed, I'm available," said Salazar, adding he also spoke to lawmakers Wednesday about energy and climate change.

Lawmakers said that **Biden** has been active in healthcare negotiations over the past several weeks but they have not noticed much of a role for Salazar and Daschle. They expect all three ex-senators to become frequent visitors - in person and on the phone - in the coming weeks.

"**Biden** has already [played] a very constructive role as far as I'm concerned, reaching out to people, talking to people, he's come to my office and having me down there," Conrad added.

Conrad, however, said he was not aware of Daschle or Salazar playing as active a role to date.

Biden and Daschle may be needed to convince liberals to agree to concessions made to centrists.

Republicans are united against the Democratic healthcare bill. Sen. Olympia Snowe (Maine), the only Senate Republican to support the Finance Committee bill, has indicated she will not back the motion to proceed. That means Reid needs every member of his conference to get the 60 votes to begin debate.

Nelson issued a statement Wednesday that a few Senate insiders interpreted as laying the groundwork for a yes vote.

Nelson defended his right to vote for the motion to begin debate, arguing that it did not equate to a vote for the healthcare reform bill.

"Let me say it again: It is a motion to start debate on a bill and to try to improve it," he said.

A senior Democratic aide said Reid will likely need two votes to overcome the Republican filibuster. One scenario would have a Saturday vote to end debate on the motion to proceed and then a Sunday vote on the motion to begin debate.

Jeffrey Young contributed to this article.

Senate Dems Take $849B Step Toward Healthcare Reform (HILL)

By Jeffrey Young

The Hill, November 19, 2009

Senate Democrats made a significant stride toward achieving President Barack Obama's goal of enacting a sweeping overhaul of the healthcare system with a bill that would spend $849 billion over 10 years to reduce the number of uninsured by 31 million people.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) introduced the bill Wednesday even as he continued to scramble to win over a handful of centrist Democrats who remain uncommitted. But Reid and other Democratic senators declared they had reached a pivotal moment in the debate.

"We've traveled really a long ways to where we are. Tonight begins the last leg of this journey we've been on now for some time," Reid said.

With the House having passed its version of healthcare reform earlier this month, Obama is closer than any president has ever been to signing into law a major healthcare reform bill.

"Today we passed another critical milestone in the health reform effort," Obama said in a statement.

Democrats invoked the memory of the late Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who called healthcare reform the cause of his life. "I intend to ensure that we do everything we can to fulfill Ted Kennedy's dream," said Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa).

But it will take more than inspiration to achieve success on an issue that has stymied presidents since Teddy Roosevelt.

The healthcare bill, and Reid's leadership of the effort, will face its biggest test yet Saturday, when the Senate will convene for a rare weekend session to hold a procedural motion on the legislation that stands as the first hurdle to advancing healthcare reform.

Even as Reid addressed the entire Senate Democratic caucus Wednesday evening and boasted about his bill, he could not say he had locked down the 60 votes he needs to ensure success on Saturday.

Centrist Democratic Sens. Mary Landrieu (La.), Blanche Lincoln (Ark.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.) continued to withhold promises to vote with Reid even after the trio sat down with the leader in his Capitol office. Reid received an assist Wednesday from Vice President **Biden**, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, a former senator from Colorado, and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), the man who would have been Obama's top healthcare adviser if he had not stepped aside amid controversy over unpaid taxes.

In a statement, Nelson hinted he might vote to advance the bill even if he did not support all of it but stopped short of declaring a position. "In reality, the meaning of the motion to proceed is very simple: It's a motion to commence debate and an opportunity to make changes," he said.

Over the course of more than a month, Reid worked through the challenge of melding separate healthcare reform bills passed by the HELP and Finance committees.

It was more than simply a legislative task. Though the two committee's bills, like the measure passed this month by the House, employ the same basic structure, they emerged from vastly different political contexts. The HELP Committee bill was considerably more liberal in its aims and more expensive in its costs compared to the Finance Committee.

Moreover, Reid had to settle vexing political questions that still threaten to divide his party. To the chagrin of some centrist Democrats, the bill includes a form of the public option prized by liberals and trouble still brewing on explosive issues such as abortion and immigration.

Republicans remain solidly opposed to the Democrats' bill, despite the majority's hope they may eventually win the support of Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine).

"While Americans have been clear about their opposition to thousand-page bills for new government programs, it's now abundantly clear that Democrats haven't been listening," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said. "This is yet another trillion-dollar experiment, but it is not what Americans bargained for."

The bill would bring the rate of legal U.S. residents younger than 65 with insurance to 94 percent by covering 31 million more people via health insurance exchange featuring private coverage and a new government-run public option plan and expanding Medicaid for the poor at a cost of $849 billion.

The health insurance exchanges in the states would take effect in 2014 and states would be permitted to opt out of the public option by passing a law to refuse it. People below 133 percent of the federal poverty level would be eligible for Medicaid. Those between 133 percent and 300 percent of poverty would receive subsidies and people between 133 percent and 400 percent of poverty would enjoy annual caps on premiums and out-of-pocket expenses as a percentage of income.

The bill also includes extensive new insurance regulations, including those that would limit companies' ability to deny coverage or care, cancel policies for the sick, vary premiums on age, health status, gender and other factors.

Individuals would be required to obtain coverage or face a penalty. Employers with more than 50 workers would have pay a fee if they do not offer affordable coverage and their employees receive federal subsidies to purchase insurance on the exchange.

In addition, the legislation would reduce to federal budget deficit by $127 billion over 10 years, according to Congressional Budget Office (CBO) figures touted by Democrats. Moreover, in the second 20 years after the bill would take effect, deficit-reduction could reach a staggering $650 billion.

To pay for their bill and achieve deficit reduction, Democrats cut Medicare spending on payments to medical providers by more than $400 billion, in part by establish new payments systems designed to promote efficiency.

The bill also would raise $371.9 billion in new taxes over 10 years, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation.

The bulk of those new revenues -- $149.1 billion -- would come from a 40 percent excise tax on the value of health insurance plans above $8,500 for individuals and $23,000 for families. Reid scaled back this tax to allay concerns about Democrats and labor unions that it would ensare too many middle-class people.

Reid added a new proposal to the bill that would increase the Medicare payroll tax for high-income earners by 0.5 percent to 1.95 percent of adjusted gross income. This new tax would raise $54 billion and affect individuals making more than $200,000 or families earning more than $250,000.

Pharmaceutical, health insurance and medical device companies would be tapped for a combined $101.9 billion in taxes. The medical device fee was more than halved from an earlier proposal to $19.3 billion to respond to complaints from Democratic Sens. John Kerry (Mass.), Evan Bayh (Ind.) and others.

In addition, the bill includes a plethora of provisions designed to improve the quality and delivery of healthcare services by means such as promoting the use of preventive medicine.

Landrieu Reax (POL)

By Live Pulse

Politico, November 19, 2009

Swing vote Sen. Mary Landrieu said she she'll decide tomorrow if she will vote to move the bill forward, after she's had a chance to read the bill. But the cost estimates being bandied about "sounds like numbers I was expecting to hear," she said.

"They're going to pull out all the stops and they're going to do everything they can to work as closely with us and again, Democrats, we're trying to stay as united as we can be. We know this is an important issue for the country and it's important we get it right. And we're moving in the right direction, for the most part. At least we're getting bills that are less than a trillion dollars, that are paid for, that are lowering the cost to the taxpayer and to businesses, so we're moving in the right direction but there's still some improvements that could be made and I'm hoping to see that on the floor."

By Jake Sherman and Patrick O'Connor

Read the rest of Landrieu's interview as captured by Sherman, the fastest transcriber this side of the Mississippi, after the jump.

Enormous cooperation to get a bill through this process. The Democrats have to try to remain united and reach out to republicans like Senator Snowe, potentially others, maybe Senator Collins as we go forward. But as you know I've been concerned about three basic things from the very beginning. One to make sure that this bill's main focus is driving down costs to small business, to families, to individuals and the government. Not just driving down costs for the government, but driving down costs for small businesses that are the key job creators that'll move us out of the recession we're in. If we can't give some relief to small business, then in my view it's almost not worth doing a bill. You know, if we cant provide a better path forward for businesses out there to be able to provide the kind of insurance at more reasonable costs, more choice more reasonable cost, it's almost worth not doing.

And then if we can't reduce the cost to the government, it's most certainly not worth doing because it's already 16 percent of our GDP. That's why until I see the CBO score and until I can review the bill, I'm just staying neutral.

And then the third piece is I understand proponents of a public option think it's a must have to keep the insurance industry honest. I want to reform the insurance industry, I do not want to eliminate them. And if we are not careful on this public option piece, you could eliminate private insurance. And that's not what we want to do. We want to reform it, we want to make sure we get rid of pre-existing conditions, if you get insurance you should keep it, we don't want to eliminate it and drive people into a government run, taxpayer subsidized public option. So those are the three things that I'm focused on. And if those issues are settled through the debate, then I'll be able to be supportive of a bill.

WHAT SHE TALKED ABOUT WITH INTERIOR SECRETARY KEN SALAZAR: We talked about the cap and trade, we talked about other options to get a carbon pricing outside the cap and trade method. We talked about off-shore oil and gas drilling, expanding domestic production, it was mostly an energy debate but we did also talk about health care. And as I said, I'm glad that the administration has asked Secretary Salazar and I think Vice President **Biden** to get more engaged. They are two members of the administration that obviously know a lot about the senate, they know all the senators, they know how the senate operates and they know we have, I mean sort of limited maneuvering room over here. We've gotta have all 60 of us and its hard to get 60 people to agree on some of these major issues. But we're making progress. But again, I'm neutral, I haven't made a final decision. I'm going to review the bill, look at the CBO score which we should be getting anytime now. And then decide to go forward. But again, if I do, if, to move for the debate, those are the three things I'll be generally looking for. And if they don't materialize I will not be supportive at the end.

ON INITIAL REPORTS OF CBO SCORE: That sounds like numbers I was expecting to hear.

They're going to pull out all the stops and they're going to do everything they can to work as closely with us and again, democrats, we're trying to stay as united as we can be. We know this is an important issue for the country and it's important we get it right. And we're moving in the right direction, for the most part. At least we're getting bills that are less than a trillion dollars, that are paid for, that are lowering the cost to the taxpayer and to businesses, so we're moving in the right direction but there's still some improvements that could be made and I'm hoping to see that on the floor.

As 2010 Looms, GOP Lays Its Bets On Opposing Health-care Reform (WP)

By Dan Balz

Washington Post, November 19, 2009

"All the anxiety's on the other side," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said with a smile earlier this week, as the Senate prepared for a historic floor debate over health care. "The hand-wringing, the agonizing, the how-do-I-explain this-to-my-constituents is on the other side."

On the day he spoke, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and White House officials were still putting out fires in their effort to round up the 60 votes necessary to clear the procedural hurdle allowing the Senate to go ahead with the debate. Reid would say only that he was "cautiously optimistic" that he would have the votes when he needed them.

McConnell went out of his way to draw a contrast with the other side. "I've got a cheerful, upbeat, optimistic team ready to go to battle over what most of my members, if not all of them, believe may well be the most important issue they will ever deal with in their time in Congress -- this effort to transform the American health care system into a European type system," he said. "So we are anxious for the debate and are going to give it our best shot. And I don't know how it's going to turn out."

President Obama and Democratic congressional leaders ultimately may prevail in their year-long effort to overhaul the nation's health care system. They have the numbers, if they can keep everyone on board once the bills have been amended on the floor and changed again in a conference committee. Still, McConnell and the Republicans now are betting that, no matter the outcome, their outright opposition to the plan advanced by the Democrats is both right on the merits and, as they look ahead to 2010, smart politics as well.

Republicans see two things that give them cause to believe their opposition will be rewarded, even if Obama eventually signs health care legislation later this year or early in 2010. The Republican base is overwhelming opposed to the measure being advanced by the Democrats. And there has been a bleeding off of support among independents for Obama's policies, particularly health care.

The latest Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 85 percent of Republicans oppose the health-care measure -- 73 percent of them strongly. That kind of energy produced the protests during the August recess, the Tea Party demonstrations this fall and the united front that Republican congressional leaders have adopted almost from the beginning of this debate.

Republicans also believe they are winning the battle for independents on health care. The Post-ABC News poll showed that only 45 percent support health care reform while 52 percent oppose it. Almost twice as many independents strongly oppose the measure as strongly support it. To Republican leaders, those numbers speak to potential anti-Democratic Party energy they hope to tap next year, even if the bill is enacted into law.

What White House and Democratic congressional leaders fear most now is a failure to reach the finish line. Failure to pass the bill would represent a huge disappointment to many of those who voted for Obama last year.

In the Post-ABC poll, 75 percent of Democrats support health care legislation, with 52 percent saying they strongly back the administration's efforts. A legislative defeat could significantly demoralize the Democratic base and lead to depressed turnout in next year's midterm elections. Which is a major reason why White House officials have preached that failure is not an option this time around.

White House officials read public opinion differently than do Republicans. They believe that Republicans in competitive races next year could pay a high price for opposing health care. They have seized on a new poll in Delaware that shows attorney general Beau **Biden** (the son of Vice President **Biden**) moving up dramatically against popular Republican Rep. Mike Castle, who has announced for the Senate and who voted against the health care in the House.

McConnell argued that Democrats have made a fateful decision to try to rally support with the argument that failure is not an option. "It's almost laughable," he said. "That's all they're left with. President Clinton was up here arguing that with the Senate Democrats about a week ago. And the reasoning was there's no other argument they can make. They've got no poll data they can show them. And so how do they get them to take a bullet for the team? They make this incredulous argument that somehow they'd have been better off if they'd passed it in the fall of '94. I don't think anybody buys that."

Democrats scoff at that assertion, believing McConnell is being disingenuous. If Republicans believe Democrats would be better off politically if the health care bill fails, they ask, why have members of the GOP worked so hard to defeat it?

White House officials believe that, if a bill passes, the political fever surrounding the legislative debate will break. Their hope is that most Americans (especially those independents who are skeptical about the bill) will find the sky hasn't fallen and, beyond that, will come to appreciate some of the insurance reforms that would prevent companies from dropping people or denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions.

McConnell notes that Obama won't face the voters until 2012. But Democrats in Congress have to worry about next year. That puts their political interests potentially at odds with those of the president. Will those Democrats in swing districts or red states ultimately buy White House arguments that a "yes" vote will be the right vote back home?

McConnell is not prepared to predict the future. But he said he believes that, "in every measurable way," Republicans are better off today than they were a year ago, with candidates "coming out of our ears" who think the climate is right. He won't say so but he also seems to believe Republicans are poised for a very good year in 2010.

The Democrats have much at stake in the health care debate. But so too do the Republicans.

ABC: Stimulus Website. ABC World News (11/18, story 5, 2:55, Gibson) reported, "The Government Accountability Office today both praised and criticized the Obama Administration's website, set up to track the number of jobs created or saved by the economic stimulus. The GAO says it's a step toward accountability. But the head of the agency that oversees the stimulus program has written Congress that they can't guarantee any of the jobs have actually been created. Jonathan Karl continues on this story tonight. Jon." ABC (Karl) added, "Charlie, the government's top watchdog says that the White House has made a solid first step towards transparency in stimulus spending but that those numbers of jobs saved and created have significant problems. More than 58,000 of the jobs the White House claims were created or retained by the stimulus come from projects where no money has been spent. Nearly 1 out of every 10 jobs claimed on the Administration's Recovery.gov website. That's according to a report by the Government Accountability Office. Republicans say the numbers don't add up." Rep. Darrell Issa, (R) Ranking Member, Oversight and Government Reform Committee: "The inaccuracy of the site also shows you just how inept the government is at getting the facts right and making them available to the public." Karl: "The White House says the problems are minimal and fixable." Ed DeSeve, senior adviser, Recovery Act Implementation: "I think the problems that we see out of 12 million data elements are probably less than 1%. They are errors that recipients made, by in large, in reporting that either they didn't have time to correct or didn't identify in time." Karl: "But the chairman of the board that oversees the stimulus tells Congress in a letter obtained by ABC News, that he 'can't certify any of the jobs data' now on the website, because the information has all been reported by the grant recipients themselves

and not independently verified. A lot of the errors are simply sloppy mistakes. In Virginia, Kevin Knight's company reported his roughly $700,000 stimulus project created ten jobs in the 36th congressional district. That district doesn't exist, but his project does, and so do the jobs. He blames the mistake on a computer glitch." Kevin Knight, president of Knight Solutions: "It actually appeared on the website where I was. It kind of popped up based on the address and zip code." Karl: "On 'The Daily Show' with Jon Stewart, Vice President **Biden** said the mistakes on Recovery.gov don't add up to much and that there's been no wasteful spending." Joe **Biden**, Vice President of the United States: "We've been in business seven, eight months. But one thing you haven't seen is that old thing about the dog that hadn't barked. You haven't seen these big wasteful - no one's come up with anything we would have gone out there and spent $2 million on something that didn't exist." Karl: "The Vice President's spokesperson today told us that the stimulus is, quote, 'the most transparent and accountable government program in American history.' But that, Charlie, is not stopping the criticism here on Capitol Hill and demands for greater accuracy. As for those reports of fictional congressional districts, we are told that most of those were corrected today." Gibson: 'Jonathan Karl on Capitol Hill, thank you."

Number Of Stimulus Jobs Created Called Into Question (WSJ)

By Louise Radnofsky

Wall Street Journal, November 19, 2009

The Government Accountability Office, the congressional watchdog, will testify at a House oversight committee hearing Thursday that there are "significant issues to be addressed" in the accuracy of reports about the number of jobs credited to the federal stimulus program because of errors in forms filed by recipients of the money.

Separately, the agency tasked with overseeing the program announced Wednesday evening that it had corrected reports by recipients who appeared to be in non-existent congressional districts, after being asked to do so by the White House.

Discrepancies in the administration's count of jobs "created or saved" by the $787 billion stimulus program are causing headaches among Congressional Democrats who are trying to craft a new jobs program in the face of the highest unemployment rate in 26 years. Rep. David Obey (D., Wis.), who as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee will have a major role in any new jobs package, released a statement earlier this week calling inaccuracies in the stimulus recipient reports "outrageous."

The reports were used by the administration to claim that the plan had directly created or saved 640,329 jobs through September. But questions have been raised about the accuracy of the job counts and other details listed on the forms since their release by the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board on its website, recovery.gov, last month.

"Many entries merit further attention," acting comptroller general Gene Dodaro is expected to say, according to a draft of his testimony received by the Wall Street Journal.

Republicans are seizing on reports of inaccuracies to question the impact and accountability of the stimulus package.

Earl Devaney, chairman of the recovery board, will also be at the House oversight committee hearing. Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.), the ranking Republican on the panel, has called for recovery.gov to carry a disclaimer "warning visitors to the Web site that the information is not accurate and auditable."

Federal agencies were responsible for reviewing each report filed by a recipient of funds they were administering, and asking recipients to fix mistakes. The recovery board and White House officials also

carried out spot checks. Still, many errors appear to have gone undetected in the 156,614 reports released last month.

Recipients of stimulus money ranging from small business contractors and community colleges to large companies and state governor's offices struggled to accurately fill in the forms. The Wall Street Journal reported two weeks ago that errors by hundreds of recipients appeared to have inflated the total number of jobs attributed to the stimulus by at least 20,000.

Some recipients also failed to correctly enter the number of their congressional district, which has led to a flurry of accusations this week from Republicans that non-existent places were claiming to have created or saved jobs. The National Republican Congressional Committee is encouraging its candidates to send out press releases highlighting the mistakes, with statements that they should undermine confidence in the government's ability to handle healthcare.

Vice President Joe **Biden**, appearing on the comedy news program "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" Tuesday, played down the congressional district errors, joking about "bad civics classes."

"The jobs actually exist," he said.

On Wednesday evening the recovery board said that it had corrected the mistakes, explaining that it is allowed to do so when there is a `` significant risk that the public will be misled or confused.

Mr. **Biden**'s assistant for implementing the stimulus plan, Ed DeSeve, told the Wall Street Journal Wednesday that the White House was still confident that it could use the reports to correctly assess "the order of magnitude of the jobs numbers that are out there." "We think it is sufficiently accurate that it provides a good snapshot of where we are," said Mr. DeSeve.

The reports come at a tough time for House leaders, who have been floating a new spending program this week, and the White House, which has announced a jobs summit for early December in the wake of a new unemployment figure of 10.2%.

Public confidence in the existing stimulus plan also remains shaky. Only 7% of respondents in a CBS News poll released Tuesday thought that the stimulus package had created jobs. Some 46% thought it would create jobs in future, but that percentage was down from 52% in September.

Write to Louise Radnofsky at louise.radnofsky@dowjones.com

GAO Calls For Clearer Guidance From Administration For Reporting Use Of Stimulus Funds (WP)

By Ed O'Keefe, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, November 19, 2009

A government audit set for release Thursday urges the Obama administration to provide further guidance on how recipients of economic stimulus dollars should report jobs created with the funding.

The administration has struggled to clearly define how to report new or saved jobs since it's difficult to know what role the funding played. Further complicating efforts, state and local governments have used much of the money to pay for temporary, part-time or seasonal work, making it unclear when and how such jobs should be reported.

The Government Accountability Office found that almost 4,000 designated recipients who have not yet received stimulus funding reported creating or saving more than 58,000 jobs. Another 9,200 recipients reported no job creation, despite receiving a total of $965 million. The findings demonstrate the difficulty of counting jobs created by the stimulus.

Some recipients may have misstated job numbers. Others may have decided to retain workers or hire new ones, knowing that they will receive stimulus funding in the near future. Other recipients that

already spent money are reporting zero jobs created or saved because they are applying a narrow definition for what counts as a "saved" job or because they may not be taking into account the jobs created by a subcontractor receiving funds from the recipient.

Auditors will present their findings at a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing at which members of both parties are expected to grill administration officials about errors submitted by recipients in their quarterly reports. Government officials on Wednesday corrected or removed several incorrect Zip codes or congressional districts from the reports posted on Recovery.gov, the government's stimulus-tracking Web site.

The GAO audit also found that the government has failed to review about 25 percent of the quarterly reports submitted by stimulus recipients. Vice President **Biden** said earlier this week that the administration has yet to review every report. "The jobs actually exist," despite concerns about the validity of stimulus data, **Biden** said Tuesday on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."

Biden noted that there have been no reports of widespread misuse of stimulus funding, but the GAO is pursuing at least eight allegations of waste or abuse of stimulus funds from more than 100 reported. The audit agency has referred at least 33 other allegations to federal inspectors general, according to the report.

Job-counting Help Is Needed (WP)

GAO calls for clearer guidance for reporting use of stimulus funds

By Ed O'Keefe, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, November 19, 2009

A government audit set for release Thursday urges the Obama administration to provide further guidance on how recipients of economic stimulus dollars should report jobs created with the funding.

The administration has struggled to clearly define how to report new or saved jobs since it's difficult to know what role the funding played. Further complicating efforts, state and local governments have used much of the money to pay for temporary, part-time or seasonal work, making it unclear when and how such jobs should be reported.

The Government Accountability Office found that almost 4,000 designated recipients who have not yet received stimulus funding reported creating or saving more than 58,000 jobs. Another 9,200 recipients reported no job creation, despite receiving a total of $965 million. The findings demonstrate the difficulty of counting jobs created by the stimulus.

Some recipients may have misstated job numbers. Others may have decided to retain workers or hire new ones, knowing that they will receive stimulus funding in the near future. Other recipients that already spent money are reporting zero jobs created or saved because they are applying a narrow definition for what counts as a "saved" job or because they may not be taking into account the jobs created by a subcontractor receiving funds from the recipient.

Auditors will present their findings at a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing at which members of both parties are expected to grill administration officials about errors submitted by recipients in their quarterly reports. Government officials on Wednesday corrected or removed several incorrect Zip codes or congressional districts from the reports posted on Recovery.gov, the government's stimulus-tracking Web site.

The GAO audit also found that the government has failed to review about 25 percent of the quarterly reports submitted by stimulus recipients. Vice President **Biden** said earlier this week that the

administration has yet to review every report. "The jobs actually exist," despite concerns about the validity of stimulus data, **Biden** said Tuesday on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."

Biden noted that there have been no reports of widespread misuse of stimulus funding, but the GAO is pursuing at least eight allegations of waste or abuse of stimulus funds from more than 100 reported. The audit agency has referred at least 33 other allegations to federal inspectors general, according to the report.

Biden: Jobs Will Lag By 12 To 18 Months (NPR)

By Mark Memmott

NPR, November 19, 2009

For anyone who's out of work, "nothing matters until you have a job," Vice President Joe **Biden** conceded on last night's The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. And, unfortunately, "jobs are going to lag behind growth in this country by somewhere between 12 to 18 months," **Biden** added.

Biden Says Errors On Recovery.gov Will Be Fixed (CNN)

By Alexander Mooney

CNN, November 19, 2009

Vice President Joe **Biden** is downplaying news the government Web site Recovery.gov reported hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars spent on projects in congressional districts that in fact do not actually exist.

(CNN) - Vice President Joe **Biden** is downplaying news the government Web site Recovery.gov reported hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars spent on projects in congressional districts that in fact do not actually exist.

The districts don't exist, but the projects do, **Biden** said Tuesday night.

And the administration isn't to blame - the fault lies with the nation's educational system.

In an appearance on The Daily Show, **Biden** said the errors - first reported by ABC News - do not indicate unaccounted-for spending but are rather the result of 70 people who are the product of "bad civics classes."

"Every single solitary penny that got sent out there to a state, a construction company, a nonprofit had to be accounted for," **Biden** told host Jon Stewart. "And it all got put on Recovery.gov. What happened was, out of 130,000 people reporting in what they did with the money.70 did not know how to count."

"There was bad civics classes for those 70 people," **Biden** continued. "They had to fill out a form, what district are you in, and there was no such district."

Biden said checkers are now going through the reports to determine the actual districts where the money was spent.

Feds: False Congressional Districts Removed From Stimulus Site (CNN)

CNN, November 19, 2009

(CNN) -- The government Web site Recovery.gov is fixing errors that appeared to show hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars were spent in nonexistent congressional districts, the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board said Wednesday.

The errors, first reported by ABC News, were seen on Recovery.gov summary pages breaking down how many stimulus dollars were received in each state's congressional districts.

Arizona's page, for example, showed the state's 52nd, 15th and 86th congressional districts received hundreds of thousands of dollars in stimulus money, according to CNN affiliate KNXV. However, no such districts exist in Arizona, which has only eight congressional districts.

A report released Wednesday by the Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity said it found such errors on pages for all 50 states, four territories and Washington, D.C. More than $6.4 billion in stimulus funds was shown as being spent -- and more than 28,420 jobs saved or created -- in 440 false districts, it said.

The districts didn't exist, but the the money and jobs did, Obama administration officials have said. And the people who are to blame are recipients who apparently didn't know which congressional district they were in, the officials said.

"We report what the recipients submit to us. Some recipients clearly don't know what congressional district they live in, so they just throw in a number for their congressional district," Ed Pound, spokesman for the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, which operates Recovery.gov, said Monday.

In an appearance on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" on Tuesday night, Vice President Joe **Biden** said the errors didn't indicate unaccounted-for spending but rather were the result of people who had "bad civics classes."

"There was bad civics classes for those" who reported the data, **Biden** said. "They had to fill out a form, what district are you in, and there was no such district."

By Wednesday evening, incorrect districts appeared to have been removed from the states' summary pages. Arizona's page, for example, listed only the state's eight real districts and a category called "unassigned congressional district," which appeared to contain all the money that had been attached to the nonexistent congressional districts.

Arizona's "unassigned congressional district" row had $39,577,600, which is roughly the total that the Franklin Center said was previously linked to nonexistent districts.

Money that was reported as having been spent in a nonexistent district would be moved, in databases on the site, to the correct one in cases where the recipient reported a ZIP code, the RATB said Wednesday evening. Recipients who didn't submit a ZIP code will need to make corrections "during the next reporting period, which begins on January 1, 2010," the board said in a news release.

The errors raised the ire of U.S. Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wisconsin, and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. On Monday, he said the mistakes "are outrageous and the administration owes itself, the Congress and every American a commitment to work night and day to correct the ludicrous mistakes."

"Credibility counts in government, and stupid mistakes like this undermine it. We've got too many serious problems in this country to let that happen," Obey said.

CNN's Alexander Mooney, Kate Bolduan and Jason Hanna contributed to this story.

Oops. Feds Add 45 Congressmen (OMAHA)

By Tom Shaw

Omaha World-Herald, November 19, 2009

If you believe the federal government's stimulus report, Nebraska's population has jumped quite a bit.

According to the report, the state has 48 congressional districts. Actually, Nebraska only has three.

Several non-existent congressional districts also were included in the report for Iowa.

The errors are another example of the problems that have plagued the stimulus reports available on the federal Web site recovery.gov.

This week, Vice President Joe **Biden** ordered officials to fix errors in the reports.

The report for Nebraska lists several congressional districts that don't exist, such as 4, 14, 31, 44 and 48.

In some cases, the number listed likely refers to a state legislative district where the money was awarded. For example, the report lists $47,897 being awarded to the 43rd Congressional District. However, the money is for housing assistance in Ainsworth, which is in the 43rd Legislative District.

In eight cases, the wrong district is listed because information for projects from other states was incorrectly included in the stimulus report for Nebraska. Projects for Minnesota, North Carolina, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri and California are in the Nebraska report.

For example, $102,375 that went to the University of California-Santa Barbara ended up being listed in the stimulus report for Nebraska.

Of course, Nebraska may wish it had a 17th Congressional District. According to the report, 22.4 jobs were created or saved there.

Where Did That Stimulus Money Go? (MINNST)

By Bob Von Sternberg, Star Tribune

Minneapolis Star Tribune, November 19, 2009

Minnesota's 27th Congressional District has snared just over $3 million in federal stimulus money, five times as much as the 57th District has gotten.

One problem: Neither district exists -- except on Recovery.gov, the Obama administration's website that tracks the flow of stimulus cash.

Beyond Minnesota's eight actual congressional districts, which have gotten the lion's share of the money, the website lists 11 phantom districts that supposedly were awarded more than $7 million in grants.

An official at the stimulus' oversight body told ABC News, which first reported the errors, that nonexistent districts were listed because some people receiving federal funds "don't know what congressional district they live in, so they appear to be just throwing in any number" on forms submitted to the government.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty took aim at the errors Tuesday, tweeting: "Fed spending out of control -- it appears to go places that don't exist. MN has 8 cong districts; Recovery.gov says we have a 57th."

The errors weren't just in Minnesota. According to ABC, administration officials say they found 700 mistakenly credited phantom districts for amounts that totaled $6.4 billion, while supposedly creating or saving nearly 30,000 jobs.

Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wis., chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, wrote the $787 billion economic stimulus bill that Congress passed in February. He has been one of the recovery effort's most ardent supporters, but earlier this week blasted the errors.

"Credibility counts in government, and stupid mistakes like this undermine it," Obey said in a statement. "The inaccuracies on Recovery.gov that have come to light are outrageous, and the administration owes itself, the Congress and every American a commitment to work night and day to correct the ludicrous mistakes."

When Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., questioned administration officials about the mistakes, Earl Devaney, chairman of the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, replied in a letter that he can't completely vouch for the numbers.

"Your letter specifically asks if I am able to certify that the number of jobs reported as created/saved on Recovery.gov is accurate and auditable. No, I am not able to make this certification," Devaney wrote, in a letter provided to ABC News.

Appearing on "The Daily Show" Tuesday, Vice President Joe **Biden** offered this defense: "Look, the bottom line is that we do check [data sent to the federal government]. But what happens is the initial report comes in cold. We don't -- of the 130,000 reports that come in, as to what they did with the money, we're now going through it."

Staff writer Eric Roper and the Washington Post contributed to this report. Bob Von Sternberg . 612-673-7184

Fact-Checking Biden's Stimulus Fact-Check (ABC News)

ABC News Blogs, November 19, 2009

ABC News' Jonathan Karl reports: Last night on "The Daily Show," Vice President Joe **Biden** addressed the reports of stimulus jobs in non-existent Congressional districts -- but in the process, he made a mistake himself.

"Out of 140,000 people reporting in what they did with the money -- who they hired, how many jobs -- 70 didn't know how to count," **Biden** told Jon Stewart. "There were bad civics classes for 70 people and they put in districts -- what district are you in? No such district.

But later, **Biden** spokesman Jay Carney told ABC News that the vice President misspoke. In fact, 700 reports were listed with fictional congressional districts.

Carney said Administration has made an unprecedented amount information public about the stimulus program.

"Never before in history has a federal government program been this transparent and accountable. Never. Not even close."

Even so, 700 represents only about one-half of 1 percent of the stimulus projects listed. The overwhelming majority of the stimulus projects, the vice president's office points out, were listed with the correct congressional district. Meanwhile, the 700 mistakes are being corrected

Biden said that, in contrast with the Bush administration, there has been no wasteful spending under President Obama.

"We've been in business seven, eight months," **Biden** said. "You haven't seen wasteful spending. No one has said we spent $2 million on things that didn't exist."

No Gaffes, Few Laughs For Biden's Sitdown With Stewart (NBC DFW)

By Greg Wilson

NBC Dallas-Fort Worth, November 19, 2009

The only gaffe came on the way to his appearance on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," and even his harshest critics couldn't blame that one on Vice President Joe **Biden**.

The loose-lipped veep played it straight with the uential funnyman, defending the Obama Administration's efforts to pass health care reform and turn around the economy. Stewart, who is known for holding the feet of politicians to the fire with his smart-alec wit, mostly went along with **Biden**, poking fun at Republicans.

When **Biden** claimed that "we're getting resistance" from Congress on reforms, Stewart gasped sarcastically, "Stop it!"

The vice president touted his party's big tent, noting there are "moderates, liberals and conservatives" within the Democrat caucus, Stewart interjected, "And communists," a poke at Republican efforts to marginalize Dems.

Before the show, an NYPD car clearing a path for **Biden**'s motorcade T-boned a livery cab on the West Side of Manhattan. Two detectives and the livery driver were treated and released from a nearby hospital.

Mr. Obama's Task (NYT)

New York Times, November 19, 2009

There is no doubt that the prospects for success in Afghanistan are so bleak right now because former President George W. Bush failed for seven long years to invest the necessary troops, resources or attention to the war. But it is now President Obama's war, and the American people are waiting for him to explain his goals and his strategy.

Mr. Obama was right to conduct a sober, systematic review of his options. We all know what happens when a president sends tens of thousands of Americans to war based on flawed information, gut reactions and gauzy notions of success. But the political reality is that the longer Mr. Obama waits, the more indecisive he seems and the more constrained his options appear.

It has been more than eight months since Mr. Obama first announced his strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, warning Americans that, for them, the border between the two - where Taliban and Qaeda forces have found safe haven - is "the most dangerous place in the world." And it has been more than a month since his top general in Afghanistan asked for 40,000 more troops, warning that "failure to gain the initiative" over the next year could make it impossible to defeat the Taliban.

.

Americans are deeply anxious about the war. As the debate among his advisers has dragged on, and became increasingly public, many are asking whether the conflict is necessary or already a lost cause. Democratic leaders are among the loudest questioners.

It has become a clich? in Washington that there are only bad choices in Afghanistan. But it seems clear that this is not the time for a precipitous withdrawal, nor can the United States cling to the status quo while the Taliban gains ever more territory and more power. To move forward, Mr. Obama needs to explain the stakes for this country, the extent of the military commitment, the likely cost in lives and treasure and his definition of success. Mr. Bush failed to do all of that in Afghanistan and Iraq.

America's allies, many of whom are looking for a way out, also need to hear why their troops should continue to risk their lives. There is no chance in Afghanistan unless President Hamid Karzai separates himself from his corrupt associates and Pakistan's leaders step up their fight against the Taliban and other extremists.

Mr. Obama said on Wednesday that he would soon provide "a lot of clarity" on his Afghanistan strategy. These are some of the things the world needs to hear.

WHAT ARE THE STAKES? We agreed with the president in August when he described Afghanistan as a war of necessity. In a speech, he warned that if the Taliban insurgency were left unchecked it "will mean an even larger safe haven from which Al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is fundamental to the defense of our people."

Since then, some of his top advisers have raised doubts about the urgency and even the necessity of the war. The national security adviser, Gen. James Jones, said in October that there were "less than 100" Qaeda members operating in Afghanistan without bases or the "ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies." He said he didn't "foresee the return of the Taliban" and that the "next step in this is the sanctuaries" in Pakistan.

Vice President Joseph **Biden** has been even more insistent that the real front is across the border and that attacking extremists on both sides could be better accomplished with a lighter footprint in Afghanistan and Predator strikes and special operations raids. Other officials argue that the Taliban may have learned a lesson and might be open to a deal that barred Al Qaeda from its territory.

Mr. Obama needs to address these arguments - to say whether he still considers fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan to be central to American security and why. Does he still believe a Taliban victory in Afghanistan would mean a "larger safe haven" for Al Qaeda? And how does he see the relationship between the war in Afghanistan and efforts to hold off extremists in a nuclear-armed Pakistan? If the Taliban were to win in Afghanistan, would they be less or more likely to threaten Pakistan?

In March, Mr. Obama warned that, for Afghans, a "return to Taliban rule would condemn their country to brutal governance, international isolation, a paralyzed economy and the denial of basic human rights," especially to women and girls. We need to hear whether he still believes Americans have a duty to stop that.

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE WAR? In March, President Obama said his goal was to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future." He also argued that bullets and bombs would not be enough to drive the Taliban back. In Afghanistan, American forces and a surge of civilian advisers must "advance security, opportunity and justice" for the Afghan people, "not just in Kabul, but from the bottom up in the provinces."

Given that, no one in the White House should have been surprised when Mr. Obama's chosen commander, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, came back with an ambitious counterinsurgency plan, although his request for 40,000 more troops was clearly higher than Mr. Obama and his aides had wanted to hear.

If Mr. Obama no longer believes that a counterinsurgency is necessary or feasible, or if he wants to set less-ambitious goals (there has been talk of securing a smaller number of cities while speeding up training of the Afghan Army), then the American people need to hear why he changed his mind and how he intends to move forward.

Mr. Obama will also have to address his vice president's proposal. We share Mr. **Biden**'s anxiety that a larger American military presence might alienate more Afghans than it wins over. But we are also skeptical that a war against Al Qaeda can be fought from a distance. Drones and commandos still need bases, and Pakistan is not likely to provide them. They need "actionable" intelligence, which could dry up with fewer American troops on the Afghan side of the border.

ARE THERE CREDIBLE PARTNERS? There is almost no chance of holding off the Taliban (or plotting an eventual American withdrawal) without a minimally credible Afghan government and security forces.

The Taliban's medieval ideas and brutality are anathema to most Afghans. We see that in the courage of the Afghan families who defy the Taliban by sending their daughters to school. But the corruption of the Karzai government, and its failure to provide the most basic services and security, have caused many of its citizens to decide that they have no choice but to submit to the Taliban.

Even after his supporters were caught trying to steal the election, Mr. Karzai remains shamelessly, insultingly undaunted. Mr. Obama must make clear to both Mr. Karzai and the American people the sweeping changes required to build a credible Afghan government. If there are other, better partners, competent cabinet members or provincial officials, then Americans need to hear how Mr. Obama plans to empower them.

Mr. Obama should be candid about his administration's halting progress. In March, he pledged to send "agricultural specialists and educators, engineers and lawyers" across Afghanistan to relieve the burden on American troops and help the government "serve its people." There are disturbing reports that the situation on the ground is so dangerous that many of these advisers cannot leave Kabul. It was chilling to read in The Times last week that when the ambassador in Kabul asked for additional civilian staff, the State Department turned down some of his requests because of budget constraints and a decision to cap the number at 1,000.

There will never be enough American troops on the ground to defeat the Taliban or provide security for Afghans. Mr. Obama must explain his plans for building a minimally functional Afghan Army and police force. More trainers are needed, but as The Times reported earlier this month, even that is no guarantee of success. According to reviews by American officials, the effort has been hobbled by a high dropout rate for recruits, "a lack of competent and professional" Afghan leadership "at all levels," widespread illiteracy and corruption.

.

WHAT WILL IT COST? Mr. Bush cynically tried to cover up the heavy costs of the Iraq and Afghan wars and cooked the financial books with repeated "supplemental" financing requests. Mr. Obama has done far better and needs to continue to tell the truth.

The human cost will continue to rise if the number of forces rises. Mr. Obama should also acknowledge the cost in military readiness and the stress of repeated deployments on troops and their families. On the financial side, the Pentagon has already spent more than $150 billion on the war. While estimates are difficult, analysts say that for every 10,000 additional troops deployed, the annual cost will rise by at least another $10 billion. Americans need to hear how those costs will be met, even though the choices - raising taxes, cutting spending or more borrowing - are unappealing in a time of recession and high deficits.

IS THERE A WAY OUT? Finally, Mr. Obama promised on Wednesday to outline an "endgame." Given Afghanistan's desperate state, we are skeptical that he can lay out a firm timetable for withdrawal. But there are certainly benchmarks that he can offer. (Mr. Obama promised that in March, but the nation has yet to hear an accounting.)

There must be a way to measure progress or failure. Americans need to know the war will not go on forever.

The First Lady Thanks Trailblazing Service Women (ABC)

By Whitney Ksiazek

ABC News, November 19, 2009

"It's never been an easy path; I can only imagine how challenging it has been and continues to be. I know that some of you have faced skepticism, ridicule, some of you had to contend not just with the challenge of doing your jobs but with others perception that you weren't up to the job strictly because of

your gender," the First Lady said as she thanked over 130 veterans that attended the East room tea at the White House.

Dr. Jill **Biden** gave the opening remarks, reaffirming the administration's commitment to raising awareness about the special circumstances women face in the military. She also took the opportunity to reiterate her and the first lady's' pledge to encourage all Americans to support the military through acts of service.

The First lady went off script to single out a few "firsts" that were in attendance, "along the way, you all broke one "brass ceiling" after another." She recognized the first female four star general, the first woman in the Navy to be promoted to Master Chief, the first woman in the Army Reserve to be promoted to the general officer rank, the first woman in the Army to receive the Expert Field Medical Badge and the first African American woman to serve as Chief Nurse at Walter Reed Hospital.

She accredited General Wilma Vaught for the event, who suggested to her that she should follow in the tradition of Eleanor Roosevelt and host a tea for service women earlier this year.

"We know that our servicemen and women's sacrifices are their families' sacrifices as well," the First Lady and Dr. Jill **Biden** said that they have learned over the course of the year that "service doesn't just end with the person wearing the uniform. "

Mrs. Obama reminded the distinguished guests that their legacy was more than just their own service, but that their legacy will be measured in the service of every woman who follows in the trails that they've blazed.

The First Lady announced that she was proud to sponsor a new Coast Guard cutter in honor of Coast Guard Commander Dorothy Stratton, who led the SPARS during World War II.

She summed up the spirit of the history of women in uniform in one phrase, "watch me."

"Watch me succeed. Watch me risk everything I have for the country I love. Watch me do my part to protect this nation and protect this union. Watch me."

Secretary Napolitano and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. James Cartwright also gave short remarks and thanked the attendees.

FLOTUS Fashion Watch: The First Lady wore a high-waisted periwinkle pencil skirt paired with a short sleeved patterned blouse with a purple bow.

Volunteers Assemble Care Packages For Female Troops (WJLA)

WJLA, November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON - Dozens of helping hands spent hours assembling care packages for people they didn't even know.

The USO-sponsored Package Stuffing Party for Women attracted about 100 volunteers to the Rayburn House Office Building Wednesday. They filled care packages with mascara, razors, lipstick and hair bands for female soldiers serving overseas.

U.S. Marine Corps Major Justin Constantine was wounded in 2006 while serving in Iraq (web | news) . He knows how much these gifts from back home make a difference to those overseas.

"Getting something like this is going to help make their day a little easier," Maj. Constantine said. "It's fantastic and that's what this is all about. A lot of the women don't get female specific items in the care packages, so this is huge for them."

ABC 7 Talkback:

Click Here to Comment on this Story

This is the first time the USO has tailor made its care packages for women in the military.

Volunteer Nancy Fiscus served in the Navy. Her husband is on his second tour of duty in Iraq.

"When we do the other care packages they don't specifically go to a woman," Fiscus said. "There's not the smelly stuff, there's not the special stuff that we need as a woman."

Jill **Biden**, the wife of the Vice President Joe **Biden**, volunteered her time to pack care packages. Her stepson Beau served in Iraq.

"As a military mom I have seen first hand how acts of kindness and service like today's effort can help improve the life of a serviceman," Jill **Biden** said.

The volunteers assembled 2,000 care packages, which should begin arriving overseas in about three weeks.

Palin Hits The (book) Trail (POL)

By Ben Smith

Politico, November 19, 2009

If Sarah Palin were running for president, this is where she'd come: The outskirts of a second city in the conservative heartland of Western Michigan, where thousands gathered Wednesday to see her, shake her hand and have her sign their copies of "Going Rogue."

And if she were running for president, she'd be doing about what she did Wednesday, under the watchful eyes a half-dozen capable advance hands, veterans of the White House and the McCain campaign, who herded the press and the public into even lines. She had a VIP list for key local conservatives, shuttling them discreetly to the front of the line. She had a few talking points, tailored for the local area, to deliver after she stepped down with a big smile from her big bus, handing baby Trig off to an aide after her four-inch heels hit the sidewalk outside a shopping mall Barnes & Nobles, where she held her first book signing.

"They deserve more credit than they're getting for the level of early organization that they have," observed John Yob, a Grand Rapids political consultant who served for a time as political director of John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign.

The stop in Grand Rapids felt like a political campaign event, not a book tour. For a woman written off as a disorganized celebrity on a tour run by monomaniacal book publicists, Palin and her aides were clearly thinking politics.

Yob was ushered past the rope line with his father, Chuck, a former Republican National Committeeman and regional power broker. The elder Yob penned an open letter to Palin after McCain announced that he was abandoning Michigan, cheering her public dissent from the campaign strategy, telling her she'd "kicked Joe **Biden**'s butt in the debate," and inviting her to "come to Michigan immediately."

Also there were the minority leader of the Michigan House, Kevin Elsenheimer, and Joanne Voorhees, the conservative Kent County Republican Party chairwoman who was briefly in the news for abruptly cancelling an event for former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, on the grounds that hosting a moderate would be breaking with Republican "roots." Two local state Representatives, Bob Genetski and Dave Agema, both devout Christian conservatives, were also invited to meet Palin.

The logistics weren't perfect: The Kent County Republicans could be heard muttering that they'd been rushed past the former Alaska governor. But Chuck Yob said he was pleased after an advance man walked him and his son to the front of the line, and Palin reacted with pleased surprise to their presence.

"Oh my God, that's neat," she said.

Palin's roadshow travels in a campaign-style bus painted to match the cover of her book, with a giant picture of Palin and Facebook and Twitter logos. She emerged with a wave for the adoring crowd, which had begun massing 24 hours earlier, and a few words for the television cameras.

Her staff was made up of volunteers: Jason Recher, a campaign advance man whom she describes in glowing terms in her book, and John Roberts, a former White House staffer, who steered her through the media scrum after she handed off her son. Also on the bus was an aide to her Political Action Committee, former RNC Finance Director Tim Crawford.

Western Michigan - an "awesome area of this great land" - can be rescued "if we apply some good free enterprise principles in our federal government," she said in a brief interview with reporters, where she dismissed Newsweek's decision to put her on its cover in running shorts as "cheesy."

"I would never have posed for Newsweek in shorts," she said of the picture, which was taken for an article in Runner's World that ran last August.

Grand Rapids was where Palin first "'went rogue' trying to reach out during the campaign," she writes in "Going Rogue," and it's the beginning of a tour that will retrace many of the stops on the Republican primary in Palin's demonstration of how the contest might have looked if she'd had her way.

Palin, meanwhile, ends "Going Rogue" with a tribute to the state.

"I'm thinking when I get back, I'll bake the kids a cake. And I'll pull out a road map - I want to show Piper the way to Michigan," she writes in the final line of her book.

The state seemed to be returning her affection Wednesday, as locals began lining up Tuesday evening outside the bookstore. By 5:00 a.m. Wednesday, hours before her appearance, the store had already handed out more than 500 wristbands entitling their bearers to a place on line. Aides said that in all, over 1,000 people had their books signed, and hundreds more came for a glimpse.

"She's one of us. She doesn't seem like a Washington elite," said Denese Crouch, a homemaker who lives outside Grand Rapids, echoing the dominant theme in a canvass of the long line, which was the ease of identifying with Palin. "She seems to figure solutions to problems like I'd do with my own family," Crouch said.

Indeed, though the line was broadly Republican, Palin's persona and her outsider status seemed to trump any particular issues with most of her admirers.

"She stands for everything I believe. I wear a suit and nylons and pumps to work" while loving nature, said Kim VandeKoppel, who runs a printing business in Grand Rapids, and who also praised Palin's "Christian beliefs."

At the front of the line was Robin Case, 44, who'd driven the previous evening from Traverse City and who sat at the front of the line in sweatpants giving an endless series of interviews to local and national reporters. "What she represents is what I'm standing in line for," she said repeatedly. "She's like you and me -- someone who represents me when we're sitting around the table like other normal folks."

Case said she stopped working to take care of her in-laws, who suffer from dementia and were driven into poverty and onto Medicaid when "they got into that donut hole with prescriptions" she said, referring to a much-criticized provision of 2003 Republican legislation.

Her criticism, a reporter noted, sounded a bit like President Barack Obama's. What did she think of his health care plan?

The politicians currently debating health care "just want to line their pockets" she responded. "Sarah Palin's not like that."

The event also drew its share of more ideological conservatives. Bob Weinert, 56, a fencing salesman from Lansing, said he'd heard Rush Limbaugh say recently that Palin is "the most conservative candidate out there." She represents, he said, "limited government and traditional values," including "putting homos back in the closet."

"And putting Christmas in the stores," added his wife, Rexanna, who said she felt she could trust the "down-to-earth" Palin.

A few minutes later, a diffident young man wandered by with a handmade "Homos for Palin" t-shirt until he encountered a mall security guard.

"You've got to zip it up or leave," said the security guard and the young man, who said he was a college student but wouldn't give his name, complied.

Palin's tour will take her through the battleground states where, she writes, she felt the McCain campaign made her pull her punches. There are stops in Fort Wayne, Indiana and Fairfax, Virginia, Florida's The Villages, and the Missouri Ozarks.

Michigan, though, is a particular preoccupation of hers, despite its place as the ancestral state of the presumptive 2012 GOP front runner, Mitt Romney, whose father was governor.

Be a part of the daily political debate with PROJECT POLITICO powered by YouTube. Click here to submit your video now and be featured on POLITICO.com.