On March 23, 2010, President Barack Obama signed a revolutionary health care reform bill like none before him had succeeded in doing (269). It took months and months of debate and compromise to come to the 216 votes he needed, but with both Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid assisting him in the process, Obama officially signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) or Affordable Care Act (ACA).

From the beginning, the leadership in this task knew the heavy reliance on Democratic votes, especially Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Due to the appeal of the bill leaning heavily toward Democratic preferences and beliefs, the reach for Republican votes would be difficult. Additionally, pulling conservative and, more specifically, Blue Dog Democrats’ votes would be a challenging task.

Pelosi faced disagreements between the liberal Democrats and the Blue Dog Democrats on the bases of the critical details of the bill: “how a requirement for everyone to buy health insurance would work, how generous the subsidies would have to be, how much people should be protected from out-of-pocket costs, and how much employers should be required to do” (162). The Blue Dogs postponed the release of the bill by stating that they were not only unhappy with the terms of agreement, but that they would not support the bill without a significant number of changes. With the Blue Dogs having over fifty members, the possibility of the bill passing was slim to none. Mike Ross of Arkansas, who was the chairman of a fifteen-member Blue Dog health care force, would not pass the bill due to the public option, the bill’s impact on employers, and the cost of the bill” (162).

In order to continue moving the bill forward and keeping on schedule, she proceeded with the releasing of the draft of the bill and gave those who opposed it time to make edits. Pelosi seemingly took a passive role in letting the Blue Dogs and the strong Liberals come to an agreement after long days of back and forth arguments. In the end, the public option was passed but with intense moderation to please the Blue Dogs, the votes of which Pelosi could not afford to lose (200). Pelosi made a point to keep the time schedule on track, trying to handle negotiation with as much poise as possible.

Majority Leader Reid made several compromises to keep both the central and progressive Democrats happy. The Public Option was sacrificed in this process. First and foremost, the Public Option was changed time after time to try and please everyone. This process included exchanging the Public Option with a Medicare buy-in and within that having extra clauses for the progressives to even the playing field. However, both options were short lived. Reid had to give up the Public Option because it was less valuable to him than the importance of keeping Lieberman in the caucus (237).

In a separate battle, Majority Leader Reid also had to agree with Nebraska Governor Ben Nelson that Nebraska would not have to assume an added Medicaid monetary burden in order to gain his vote for the healthcare bill to pass. Reid had to make sacrifices in order to build the necessary number of votes needed to help the Affordable Care Act pass. Nelson had several problems with the language of the bill and he refused to sign it because of pressure from other Nebraska politicians as well as his thought about how the bill would affect Nebraska’s economic status. Nelson would not sign the bill because he felt as though the bill “was not written tightly enough to prevent public funding of abortions through the health exchanges” (237). In order to turn Nelson’s vote, Reid had to greatly compromise. Not only would he have to modify the language of the bill to separate the payment of abortion versus non abortion health care funding, but he also agreed to pay for Nebraska’s Medicaid payments just to pull Nelson’s vote. Majority of the states would have a partial payment of their Medicaid costs; however, in order to secure the vote Reid had to agree that Nebraska’s payment would be done in full by the federal government.

Deals such as this one are not uncommon in order to sway votes. With each piece of legislation that needs to be fought for to be passed, compromises need to be made. Between the two houses, one party cannot pull enough votes to do it alone. Moreover, deals need to be made because of the large spectrum of moderate versus conservatives within each party.

In January 2010, the race to finalize the bill seemed within reach. However, there was a turn of events when Republican Scott Brown won the Massachusetts Senate seat, following Democrat Ted Kennedy (241). With a Republican replacing a Democrat, politics were expected to change. However, without the final cost estimate for the bill, there was no way to secure votes before the Senate set election in Massachusetts.

Once elected, Brown would likely cause a sudden death in the prospects for health care reform. Brown felt as though the bill was an unnecessary expense because, according to him, Massachusetts already has ninety-eight percent of people insured (242). The money Massachusetts would be putting towards the bill would only pay for other parts of the country to receive health care rather than benefit Massachusetts.

Not only was Brown’s vote important, but it changed the political climate. Obama lost his sixtieth vote when Brown was elected, and this caused a halt in Obama and the Democrats in Congress from making history and changing health care in America. When Brown mentioned the unnecessary monetary weight the bill would be putting on Massachusetts, it showed how many prospects were reconsidering due to the final bill cost estimate. Holdouts on votes were made until the estimate for the final bill was revealed.

In order to make both the Senate and the House content with the bill, Nancy Pelosi came up with the idea that there should be more than one bill if he wanted continue the push to move the bill forward. First in place, a reconciliation bill to fix the problems her caucus saw with the Senate bill, which was favorably written for the House approval rather than the Senate approval. This strategy was necessary because as it stood, there was no way both the House and the Senate would approve the same bill. Their demands were too different. However, with a "Two Bill" strategy, the bill would have the same core, however it would be slightly different between the sections of Congress.

The "Two Bill" strategy had a change of working due to the fact that there was theoretically double the room for compromise with two bills. For example, while the Massachusetts Senate seat election was occurring, both Obama and Reid pushed Pelosi to put the Senate bill to a vote in the House, and pass it as it stood. Pelosi was clear that the language would discourage members of the House from signing it, and she knew that it would not be passed in its current state (244). However, with the "Two Bill" strategy there was hope.

The "Two Bill" strategy could be a success with the structure of government between the two houses because both the Senate and the House would have a “custom” bill. In the House, the second bill would give the House the ability to “rewrite the parts of the Senate bill that the House hated the most, and it would be passed through the budget reconciliation rules” (245). In juxtaposition, in the Senate, there would only be a minimal reconciliation bill rather than a detailed reconciliation bill in which could have been vulnerable to rules challenges (245). Additionally, the Senate would only need fifty-one votes to pass the new piece of legislature, rather than sixty (245).

The “Two Bill” strategy was a challenge due to the nature of how the bills were working to be passed previously versus with the separate bill strategy. The problem rested in the fact that previously, the language of the bill leaned more towards the House, and therefore while the House had a difficult time committing to signing the bill, they were more willing than the Senate (247). More focus has been on using the jargon favorable to the House and pushing it in the Senate to find sixty votes. However, the “Two Bill” strategy was based on the Senate bill with language that the House would simply not pass. The previous strategy was hard enough to pass, however the complete change of directions threw another wrench in the mix.

Several differences the House would have to address included the Cadillac tax, the premium tax cuts and the gap in prescription drug coverage. One specific problem arose with the House wanting to cut the Cadillac tax. With the cut of that tax, there would be a $149 billion deficit in the funding (248). The back and forth about the tax caused a question of which house would need to pass it first and how careful the wording had to be to gather the number of votes necessary. Pelosi and Reid needed to consider all options and potential outcomes before taking on this new challenge.

Several compromises were made to keep pushing forward in the bill signing process. The revised Senate bill for the House included:

The House would get the increase in subsidies, the closing of the Medicare donut hole, and more Medicaid assistance to all states instead of the Nebraska deal. The Senate’s Cadillac tax would not be completely gone, but it would be cut way back, to about 20 percent of the amount that had been in the Senate bill. Instead, there would be a new Medicare tax on unearned income, such as investments. (251).

However, to guarantee the addition bill of fixes be passed, Pelosi had to work on mending trust between both the House and Senate Democrats. The process involved a formal signature of Democratic senators signing a letter to promise the passing of the bill as well as signatures from the necessary fifty-one Senate cosponsors (251). Additionally, a meeting between President Obama and the House and Senate Democrats would seal the deal. History would be made.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi needed to continue adding votes to ensure a solid safety net of votes for the bill rather than against it. Pelosi used similar tactics during this process as she did to handle previous conflict in the earlier states of the bill passing. In order to keep obtaining votes, she needed to resolve the conflict over the abortion language of the bill. The Pro-Life Democrats fought the Pro-Choice Democrats for the terms of abortion in the bill. Bart Stupak was on the forefront of the fight to change abortion language to a more Pro-Life wording. However, Pro-Choice Democrats were highly against any changes to the abortion section and cautioned that Pelosi would lose “anywhere from forty to fifty-five Democratic votes” (261).

In order to come to common grounds, Pelosi took an approach which included talking the bill out, section by section, in order to find compromise. Day after day, she worked with Stupak and other Pro-Life Democrats to find a ground they were comfortable standing on. Eventually, an executive order was created to “specifically prohibit the use of tax credits and cost-sharing reduction payments to pay for abortion services” (265). After the Pro-Life Democrats agreed to the new draft that included the executive order, the Pro-Choice Democrats also scanned the new terms. Because of how vague the wording was, they also agreed to the propositional agreement. Finally, Pelosi asked Stupak if she had secured her 216 votes, and he replied, “We’re well past 216” (266).

When put up to vote, the Senate bill had won 219 votes, leaving only the House (267). The House needed enough Republicans to commit in order to pass the bill. Stupak’s abortion language assured Republicans that were on the fence that “all lives from the unborn to the last breath of a senior citizen is honored and respected. For the unborn child, his or her mother will finally have pre- and postnatal care under our bill. If the child is born with mental problems, we provide medical care without bankrupting the family” (267). This assurance helped the bill pass quickly in the House. By the end of the night, the bill was passed with enough votes from both the Senate and the House to finally be signed by President Barack Obama.

The health care reform bill made history for revolutionizing health care for millions of Americans. Months of debate and compromise lead the bill to be passed successfully. Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Democrats had to compromise to make the bill a success. Liberal Democrats and Blue Dog Democrats had to find common ground to make the bill a success. Moreover, the Democrats and willing Republicans had to be on similar pages and relate to make the bill a success. Without months of intricate collaboration, this major piece of legislation would not be passed. The process, in its entirety, of passing the health care reform bill showed how elaborate the government systems work together and separately to pass both large and small pieces of legislation.

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