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## House Passes Amendments to Healthcare Reform Law for Second Time

Robert Lowes

March 25, 2010 — The House tonight approved amendments to the country's new healthcare reform law for the second time in 5 days in a 220 to 207 vote.

The second vote may have seemed like a ho-hum housekeeping matter — after all, the House only needed to correct technical glitches in the amendment bill, which had no effect on a healthcare reform law that, as amended, will extend coverage to an additional 32 million Americans during the next 10 years.

However, the nighttime vote took place with a backdrop of vandalism, acts of intimidation, and death threats directed at a dozen or so House members in the days following House passage of a healthcare reform bill last Sunday, along with the amendments. One Republican, House Republican Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA), said someone shot a bullet through the window of his campaign office in Richmond, Virginia. Democrats have accused Republicans of indulging in violent political rhetoric that incites actual or threatened violence. Republicans counter they're being unfairly tarred with this charge.

The amendments to the healthcare reform law appeared in a budget reconciliation bill — a legislative vehicle for adjusting revenue and spending lines in the federal budget. After the reconciliation measure received its first approval from the House on Sunday, it went before the Senate, where Republicans found 2 minor violations of the stringent congressional rules governing these kinds of bills. A spokesperson for Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said the glitches involved the Federal Pell Grant Program (the reconciliation bill also revamped financial aid programs for college students).

Senate Democrats fixed these glitches in the reconciliation bill, passed it Thursday afternoon by a 56 to 43 margin, and sent it back to the House for the final vote. It now awaits the signature of President Barack Obama.

### **Medicare Patients Will Receive a \$250 Rebate This Year Toward the "Doughnut Hole"**

The healthcare reform bill passed by the House on Sunday — and previously passed by the Senate — became the law of the land when President Obama signed it on Tuesday. The new law requires most individuals and families to acquire health insurance, but offers them premium subsidies if they purchase it through state-based insurance marketplaces called exchanges. Small businesses also can buy coverage through exchanges with the help of tax credits.

The law boosts Medicaid enrollment by almost 50% and bans private health insurers from denying anyone coverage based on preexisting conditions or canceling coverage if sickness strikes.

The amendments in the reconciliation bill translate into significant changes in both the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Medicare recipients will receive a \$250 rebate this year toward the "doughnut hole," the coverage gap in the Medicare Part D prescription drug program that forces seniors to bear the full cost of medications. And that gap will eventually shrink, disappearing in 2020.

The reconciliation bill also increases Medicaid reimbursement to pediatricians, general internists, and family physicians to 100% of Medicare levels in 2013 and 2014. Democrats introduced this provision to help ensure that the 16 million additional Americans who will gain Medicaid coverage under healthcare reform will be able to find a physician willing to treat them.

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Disclosure: Robert L. Lowes has disclosed no relevant financial relationships.

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