



Senate Finance Committee Approves Health Care Reform Proposal

On October 13, the Senate Finance Committee (SFC) approved the America's Healthy Future Act of 2009. This sets the stage for the SFC health care reform proposal to be combined with the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee proposal for action by the full Senate.

Background

In July, the Senate HELP Committee passed the Affordable Health Choices Act and three House committees passed their versions of the America's Affordable Health Choices Act. (See our September 21, 2009 [For Your Information](#).) With the passage of the SFC proposal, all five Congressional committees with authority over health care reform have now approved health care reform legislation. The next step is for the Senate to reconcile its two reform bills, and for the House to do the same with its three reform proposals.

Changes in the Final Senate Finance Committee Proposal

The final SFC proposal includes a number of changes from prior versions. Two of the more significant changes are higher threshold limits for the excise tax for retiree plans, and lower penalties for individuals who do not have health coverage. Significantly, the SFC proposal still does not include an employer mandate or a public plan option – two provisions that are included in the other proposals and which will most likely be introduced as amendments during the debate. We have updated our high level side-by-side [comparison](#) of the House and Senate proposals to reflect the final SFC proposal. This summary will continue to be updated as legislation moves through Congress, and updates can be accessed through this same link.

Buck has also prepared an annotated [flow chart](#) which compares the House, Senate HELP and SFC proposals, and provides a high level overview of how the employer and individual mandates work under each proposal.

Conclusion

As the health care reform proposals work their way through Congress, employers should begin assessing how they may be affected. Buck's consultants are available to answer any questions you may have about these proposals and to help you determine their potential impact on your programs and employees.

This FYI is intended to provide general information. It does not offer legal advice or purport to treat all the issues surrounding any one topic.