

# Reconciliation and Representation: The Share of the Population Represented by the Democratic Majority

BY SARIKA GUPTA\*

With the debate over health care dragging on, it is becoming increasingly likely that the Senate will pass a bill through the reconciliation process, requiring just a simple majority rather than the super-majority needed to break a filibuster. Some observers have argued that such a move would effectively circumvent the normal democratic process. While one can question how much deference should be given to traditions and procedures in various circumstances, it is relatively easy to determine the extent to which the likely Senate majorities represent the majority of the population.

The methodology is straightforward. Each senator can be thought of as representing half of his or her respective state's population. Therefore, the total number of people represented by senators in favor of passing the health care bill divided by the total U.S. population gives the proportion of the nation's population represented by senators who support the bill. The same calculations can be used to calculate the proportion of the population represented by senators voting against the bill.

In the event that the Senate passes the health care bill through reconciliation, the two graphs below show the percentage of the U.S. population that would be represented by senators voting for and against the bill, given two possible scenarios that could arise.

**Figure 1** represents what the distribution of votes would be if all Democrats and Independent senators Bernie Sanders (Vermont) and Joe Lieberman (Connecticut) vote to pass the health care bill while all Republicans vote against it. In this situation, the 59 senators voting in favor of the health care bill would represent 63.0 percent of the American people, whereas the 41 senators opposed to the bill would represent only 37.0 percent of the population.

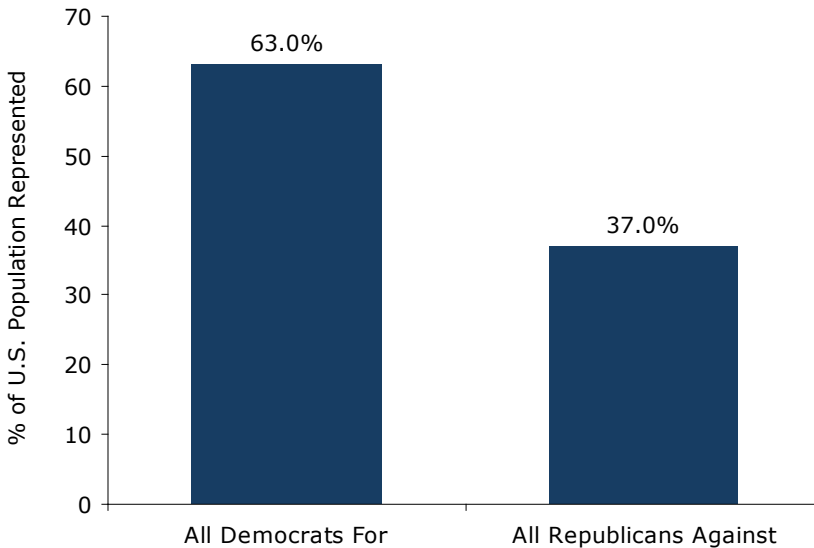
**Figure 2** shows what is perhaps the more realistic outcome of the Senate vote by taking into consideration the three Democratic senators – Blanche Lincoln (Arkansas), Ben Nelson (Nebraska), and Mary Landrieu (Louisiana) – and Independent Joe Lieberman, who are predicted to oppose the health

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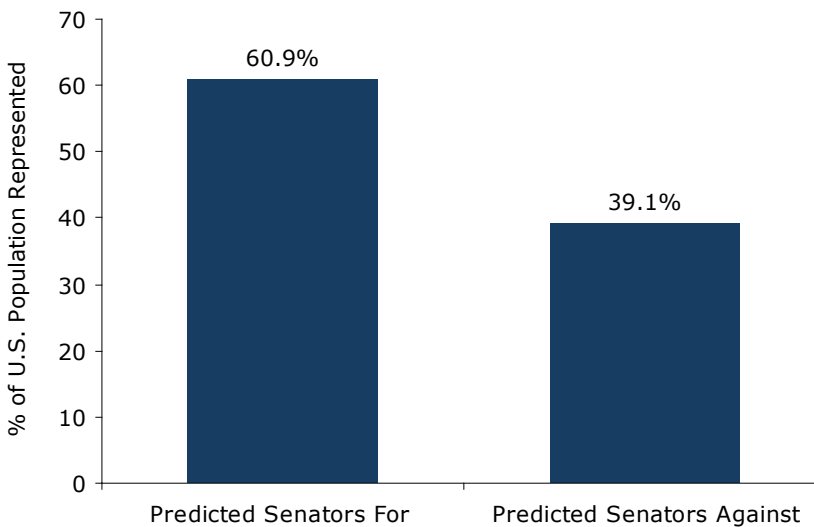
care bill. Even if these four senators vote against the bill along with all of the Republicans, the remaining senators voting in favor of the bill will still represent a clear majority of the U.S. population at 60.9 percent.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Projected Senate Vote Weighted by U.S. Population, Party Line Vote**



Source: Population figures were taken from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Population Estimates, excluding D.C.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Projected Senate Vote Weighted by U.S. Population, More Realistic Vote**



Source: Population figures were taken from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Population Estimates, excluding D.C.

As indicated by the figures, if Democrats do use reconciliation to pass the health care bill, senators who represent the vast majority of the nation's population will have supported the bill. This assessment holds even if several of the senators who have indicated serious reservations end up voting against the bill.