

Sen. Kennedy's staff works to make Obama health plan passable in first term.

[Bloomberg News](#) (11/6, Marcus) reports that Michael Myers, staff director for Sen. Edward Kennedy's (D-MA) Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, attended a Families USA forum Thursday, where he revealed that his staff is holding regular meetings with interest groups "to translate Obama's healthcare plan into legislation that can be passed by Congress." Myers said Kennedy will "take his 'cues from the Obama White House,'" and he expected that Congress will act on a measure in Obama's first term. Congress last year "insisted that any new legislation be paid for with revenue from other sources, such as tax increases, or spending cuts, to avoid increasing the budget deficit." Myers said Sen. Kennedy's staff "is looking for ways to save money," but there is also the possibility that "not 'every penny and every dime' spent will be paid for in advance."

[The Hill](#) (11/7, Young) added that Myers said that "healthcare reform could require Congress to make exceptions to pay-as-you-go budgeting." He said, "Certainly, there's a strong inclination within large quarters of Congress that [health reform] has to be substantially paid for, but whether it's every penny, every dime -- those discussions still have to happen. ... We're looking at ways, through healthcare reform itself that will save a lot of money." Additionally, Families USA president Ron Pollack "expressed hope that skeptical budget hawks would consider the future benefits of Obama's cost-cutting measures."

[CQ](#) (11/6, Nylen) reported that Myers explained that his staff has already started to craft "a comprehensive overhaul that includes changes to coverage, cost and quality." Although the committee has met several times with the Senate Finance Committee, in discussions mostly involving Democrats, Myers said he expected Republicans to join the talks now that the election is over. Robert Laszewski of Health Policy and Strategy Associates, speaking separately Thursday at a forum sponsored by Congressional Quarterly and the Public Affairs Council, downplayed the likelihood of a comprehensive bill, arguing that most people have health insurance. Instead, he urged Obama and his congressional allies "to pass piecemeal legislation that would extend the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), prevent physicians from facing a Medicare payment cut next December, and potentially provide a tax credit to small businesses, among other things." [Modern Healthcare](#) (11/6, DoBias) also covered the story.

Negotiations for healthcare overhaul may be protracted given struggles in Massachusetts reforms. In the [Wall Street Journal](#) (11/6) Health Blog, Jacob Goldstein wrote, "Barack Obama's proposed health reform plan has a lot in common with the big health-policy changes Massachusetts made a few years back," and, therefore, "the state's struggles and successes are worth paying attention to." Among the challenges to the state's reforms are "businesses pushing back against rules that require them to offer health insurance or pay a fee." But, because "Obama's plan contains a similar provision," efforts to negotiate "broad support for a national plan could be protracted," Goldstein noted. In fact, overhaul of the nation's healthcare system may not be "the kind of thing that's pushed through in a barrage of first-100-days legislation," he added.