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# Maryland health leaders divided over reform bill

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Opinions on the details of a sweeping health care reform bill varied Monday among Greater Baltimore health care leaders, with most agreeing it was necessary all Americans have coverage, but some concerned about the costs tied to the bill and the impact it will have on doctors.

It was all the talk Monday as a weekend of debate among members of Congress ended up in the approval of sweeping health

reform legislation late Sunday night. The bill, which still needs a final signature from President Barack Obama, has been a hot topic in Washington, D.C., for more than a year and served as a top priority for many lawmakers.

"I'm feeling very good about it," Warren Green, CEO of **Lifebridge Health**, said of the health care reform bill. "I think it's an imperfect piece of legislation but all pieces of legislation of that size and complexity going through the legislative mill have shortcomings."

Green, in an interview Monday, said the plan to cover 32 million uninsured Americans is a step in the right direction. More than 600,000 uninsured Marylanders, including more than 63,000 in Baltimore, will gain access to affordable coverage, according to a report released Monday by Baltimore HealthCare Access Inc.

But Green, who oversees Sinai and Northwest hospitals, as well as Levindale Hebrew Geriatric Center and Hospital, said he remains concerned about physician reimbursement and how new systems and technology will be paid for. Green said it's too early to determine how much technology upgrades could cost, but Maryland is already receiving \$9.3 million in federal stimulus funds to build an exchange for electronic health records was a start.

But the critics are many for the legislation.

Among them MedChi, the state's medical society, said the legislation does not address problems with tort reform and the sustainable growth rate formula dealing with upcoming cuts to Medicare. A correction to those two issues were the biggest position MedChi had been taking on health care reform, said Gene Ransom, the association's CEO. Tort reform, a hotly debated political issue, would reduce the medical liability doctors are now paying. Ransom said the current bill has \$50 million set for tort reform, which is small for the entire U.S.

Ransom plans to continue conversations with local Congressional lawmakers to see that those issues are better addressed.

The region's largest health care insurer, **CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield**, was mum on the passage in a statement Monday.



Warren Green is CEO of Lifebridge Health.

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“We are assessing the likely impacts of the legislation. Naturally, we will comply with all applicable components of the legislation should it become law.”

Philadelphia-based Cigna, and a local insurance provider, said the legislation will impact the lives of many, but strongly believes the law does not adequately improve quality or address the dramatic cost increases of the health-care delivery system — which, along with providing insurance to all, had been the main reasons Obama and his core liberal base pursued the legislation. In particular, Cigna said the system must change from pay per service or quantity to pay for outcomes and efficiency.

“Without continued participation of all stakeholders to offer constructive solutions, the current proposal will only expand access and further erode affordability and quality of care for all,” Cigna said in a statement. “This is not a sustainable solution to America’s rising health-care cost problem.”

Vincent DeMarco, president of the Maryland Citizens’ Health Initiative, applauded the passage, calling it “life-saving legislation.” “Here in Maryland, we will build on this success by making sure federal reform is fully implemented in our state, making sure that everyone who is eligible for the new health care expansion gets enrolled, and by building on this great success to make sure that quality health care is affordable for all Marylanders,” DeMarco said in a statement.