

THE VOTE: Tally is 219 to 212, with 216 needed for approval

POLITICS: All Republicans plus 34 Democrats vote no

WHAT'S NEXT: Senate OK of amendments expected

HEALTH VOTE HISTORIC



CHARLES DHARAPAK Associated Press

Speaker Nancy Pelosi heads to the Capitol on Sunday to vote on health care. With her are Democratic congressmen, from left, Steny Hoyer, John Lewis and John Larson.

Area reaction spans elation, hesitation

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It was a watershed moment decades in the making, ending years of failure and frustration for longtime health care advocates like Beth Capell, who cried with joy Sunday.

Both sides of the health care debate called Sunday's House vote historic. But, for Capell, she had a victory to savor: passage of federal legislation that

would remake the country's health care system and extend medical coverage to nearly all Americans.

"It's a remarkable moment," said Capell, a program manager for Health Access California. "It's a transformational moment for America."

Capell compared the passage with other key legislation that created Social Security and Medicare and ensured

civil rights. "I've worked hard on this for a long time. It's about all those people who have lacked health insurance when they should have had it," she said.

For Patrick Johnston, president of the California Association of Health Plans, which opposed the overhaul legislation, passage means a difficult road ahead.

"There is a lot of work to be

done in California," Johnston said. "Health plans in California are ready to work with state and federal officials to implement the complexities of what will become the new law."

But, he said, extending health coverage to the millions of uninsured, including the 8 million in California, does nothing to contain costs.

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Reaction: Matsui cites health issues of 2 area residents

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Many details aren't fully resolved. The thorny issue of abortion, for example, won't immediately fade, as abortion-rights advocates press for clarification about how the legislation could affect reproductive rights under *Roe v. Wade*, said Deborah Ortiz, vice president of public affairs for Planned Parenthood's Mar Monte region.

"It is a compromise we can live with for today," Ortiz said. "The bigger picture is that millions of people will finally have health care."

Marty Keale, executive director of the Capitol Community Health Network, which represents Sacramento County's largest nonprofit clinics, called it "an incredible day."

"The United States has finally decided to catch up with the rest of the civilized world," he said.

The complexities of the bill drew charges from Republicans that Democrats were being too hasty in pushing for passage.

In the closing minutes of the debate, Rep. Dan Lungren, R-Gold River, attempted a delay. Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, called the legislation a government takeover of the country's health care system.

The fight isn't over, McClintock said Sunday night. He predicted a battle in the U.S. Senate, where a reconciliation bill must be approved. He also predicted legal challenges.

On the House floor, Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Sacramento, noted the historic vote.

"I wasn't here 10 or 20 years ago as the health care debate ebbed and flowed," she said on the House floor. "But I am here today. And as an old friend said to me today, 'There are not

too many times in politics that you get to do something monumental.' And this is the day."

During her House floor speech, Matsui invoked the names of two Sacramentans, Tim Sullivan and Elizabeth Bell, to argue for passage.

"It's really exciting she mentioned me, and that my voice was included," said Bell.

Bell lost her health coverage through her parents' plan when she turned 23. But her parents stepped in to pay her premiums. Shortly after, she developed a severe thyroid condition.

"For me, I'm really lucky that I have parents who are supporting me in this way," said Bell, who hasn't found a job with health benefits.

She wrote Matsui last year, during the height of last summer's congressional town hall meetings, to share her story.

Sullivan called Matsui three days ago.

Sullivan has been unemployed since October and is relying on COBRA subsidies to hold on to his health insurance. He was a self-employed contractor until the housing downturn forced him out of private business.

"I'd rather work on my own," said Sullivan.

"I want this bill to pass," he said, as the House debate dragged into the night. "This system holds people back. This system discourages entrepreneurship. Someone like myself, who is 51, has to work for somebody to have health insurance."

Under the bill, the self-employed would have access to a government-established insurance exchange from which they will be able to buy coverage.

The California Hospital Association had endorsed the federal legislation on Friday, said the group's spokeswoman, Jan Emerson.

"This has been a long time coming," Emerson said. "This is an important first step, and now the rest of the work needs to be done."

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