

Ctnewsjunkie.com

SustiNet Veto Overturned, Partnership Veto Sustained in Senate

by Christine Stuart

July 20, 2009

The House and the Senate succeeded in overturning Republican Gov. M. Jodi Rell's veto of the SustiNet bill Monday, but the state Senate failed to overturn the Healthcare Partnership bill after one senator failed to vote even though she was still in the building.

"The insurance capital of the country just passed a bill that provides a framework for a public option," Juan Figueroa, president of the Universal Health Care Foundation, said as he celebrated with supporters on the fourth floor of the state Capitol.

The passage of the SustiNet bill "really puts the state in a great position" as the national health care debate continues, Figueroa said.

Speaker of the House Chris Donovan, D-Meriden, said the override of the SustiNet bill positions the state for federal funds and makes it "Obama-ready." However, Donovan was unable to hide his disappointment in Sen. Joan Hartley, who decided not to vote on his Healthcare Partnership bill.

"It's a missed opportunity for the businesses and employees in her town," Donovan said.

As Hartley stepped into the elevator to exit the building Monday she was asked why she failed to vote on the bill. As she looked down at her cellphone she explained, "I think the state of Connecticut cannot afford it at this time." She said the state has failed to solve the "budget crisis" and doesn't believe an actuarial analysis of the Healthcare Partnership bill—which would allow certain groups to join the state employees health insurance pool—has been conducted.

Hartley, a Democrat from Waterbury, was also absent the first time the Senate passed the bill back on May 30.

Aside from a debate over whether it would save the state money, Donovan's Healthcare Partnership bill received other criticism too.

House Minority Leader Lawrence Cafero, R-Norwalk, warned his colleagues in the House not to hurt themselves patting themselves on the back after passing the Healthcare Partnership bill because "it won't do a thing about the uninsured." He said at least the SustiNet bill is creative in trying to solve the problem of the uninsured.

The Healthcare Partnership bill passed by a vote of 105 to 37 in the House before failing to get the two-thirds majority needed to override a gubernatorial veto in the Senate.

Donovan said he doesn't know when it happened, but when he first started as a legislator health care was a bipartisan issue. "Now the Republicans have decided to be against health care reform when health care reform is not a partisan issue," he said.

Cafero, a Republican, said he opposed the SustiNet bill because it would cost the state \$1 billion per year after its implemented. Rell sent out a statement Monday evening saying, "I remain particularly concerned about the fiscal impact of the SustiNet bill."

"The simple fact is that the families and employers of Connecticut cannot afford the new taxes that will be required by this new program," Rell said.

Proponents of the bill said it doesn't cost the state anything over the next two years as the Sustinet board of directors develops the framework for a state health care system, which includes a type of public option.

Figueroa said it's different than Massachusetts where they addressed the issue of access before addressing quality and cost. Sustinet is designed to look at costs and quality at the same time as access, he said as he was interrupted by hugs from supporters and phone calls.

"This vote will be heard around the country," Tom Swan, director of the CT Citizen Action Group, said Monday. "When the insurance capital of America votes to move forward with a public health insurance option, it makes sounds that will reverberate through the halls of congress."