

I'm with Stupak redux

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

March 17, 2010

Will Rep. Bart Stupak and his gang of anti-abortion House Democrats [derail health-insurance reform](#)?

Stupak's been [talking tough and pushing for a deal](#) that would go farther in restricting abortion funding than the current language of the Senate bill does. But the House leadership [concluded](#) that it can't change the Senate's abortion language via budget reconciliation, the only legislative way forward on reform. [Amy Sullivan thinks](#) this probably means the Catholic bishops will end up opposing the bill. [Jonathan Cohn](#) and [Brian Beutler](#), however, aren't sure negotiations are actually over yet.

Confused?

Expect plenty more of the same in the next few days as the vote counting, calculated posturing and ambiguous reports continue.

The

substantive question is less of a moving target. Does the Senate bill actually loosen current restrictions on federal abortion funding?

In a word: no. In a lot of words, [this letter](#) from 25 Catholic and evangelical leaders—including some bona fide pro-lifers—analyzes the bill and concludes that “longstanding restrictions on federal funding of abortion have been maintained.” For less activist-y takes, see [Timothy Noah](#) and [David Gibson](#).

Meanwhile, Matt Miller [reminds us](#)

that this whole debate is about federal funding of abortion coverage specifically for lower-income women. No one's taking on the \$250 billion the government spends each year subsidizing the coverage that middle- and upper-income women get through their employers. As usual, people with more money (and more political power) stand to end up with more

rights. It's the [argument I made](#) in December, after the first time Stupak dug in on this issue.

Last

time, the House leadership accommodated Stupak to ensure the bill's passage. The different rules that apply to the reconciliation process make that harder to do this time around. If Stupak *et al* don't back down, and if it turns out the leadership doesn't have the votes, health-insurance reform could go down over a handful of representatives' incorrect belief that the bill fails to maintain the status quo on restricting federal funding of abortion for the poor while tolerating it for the rich.

With principled stands like this, who needs cynical politics?