

GOP insurance plan debated in U.S. Senate

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U.S. Senate debate is focusing on a Republican plan to reportedly allow health insurers to ignore state-mandated benefits.

Democrats say the GOP bill allow insurers to ignore Massachusetts' new universal health insurance law, while charging older and sicker people far higher premiums, The Boston Globe reported Thursday.

Supporters say the plan is designed to reduce the number of uninsured residents by helping small businesses jointly purchase less expensive insurance for their employees, the Globe said.

But U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., the ranking Democrat on the Senate's health committee, told the newspaper the Republican plan would most likely force older residents and those with major health problems from the insurance market, while allowing insurance companies to offer sub-par coverage.

"We (in Massachusetts) have passed a good bill that will cover all the people in our state, no matter what their illness, no matter what their sickness," Kennedy said. "This legislation on the floor of the United States Senate would effectively undermine that, and kill that legislation."

The Republican bill states it "shall supersede any and all state laws" regarding mandated health coverage, the Globe said.

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