

WAXMAN'S METHODS

In a jello-wrestling match between Rahm Emanuel and Henry Waxman, I think I'd bet on the latter. While Rahm has been frantically and loudly pursuing two opposing strategies—the Messina-Baucus welfare program for the insurance industry hidden under the guise of the public option kabuki, Waxman has been quietly preparing for battle in September. And it sounds like the insurance industry is getting increasingly worried that Waxman will be better prepared than Rahm and his little kabuki dance.

House Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman raised eyebrows this week when he launched a financial probe into the nation's largest insurance companies, which are at the center of the health reform battle.

Now POLITICO has learned that Waxman's recent investigation began almost a month earlier than previously thought — with letters to the insurance industry's powerful trade group and its consultant regarding grassroots tactics.

A committee spokeswoman defended the probes — saying lawmakers need to know that private insurance money is being spent effectively as part of the effort to control costs. But the trade group, America's Health Insurance Plans, is crying foul, saying Waxman is merely trying to bring it in line behind his version of the health reform bill.

"Congressional oversight is not a tool that should be used to chill dissent," said AHIP spokesman Robert Zirkelbach. "These investigations are nothing more than politically motivated, taxpayer-financed fishing expeditions designed to intimidate and silence health plans."

Now, I don't for a second think that Waxman can

win this on his own, that even armed with the information he's seeking (assuming the insurance industry doesn't stall, which they will) he will be able to silence Baucus and his industry-owned cohort.

But at the very least, what Waxman will succeed in doing is demonstrate that his legislative foes haven't even considered (or, more likely, would like to hide) the business realities of those whose bidding they're doing. You're going to have health insurance executives asking for a huge subsidy at the same time as they cry foul when asked to provide some documents about their business. And those hysterical cries will be pitted against some very rational voices speaking quietly about cost control—precisely what the Blue Dogs and the insurance industry shills claim to be pursuing.

“If we're going to get health costs under control, we need to make sure that our private health insurance dollars are spent as efficiently as possible. That means our premium dollars should be paying hospitals and physicians for providing health care, not wasting resources on administrative bloat,” she said.

Oh, and as I suggested in my earlier post on this, Waxman will just happen to be collecting information that Evan Bayh would rather we didn't have.

I'm getting a feeling that the untold—and developing—story of this health care debate is that when Waxman was forced to push through an imperfect bill with the Blue Dogs on his committee, when he got stuck in negotiations with Rahm just before the break, he realized he was getting screwed. And, lucky for us, he was in a position to do something about it, to prepare for the fight that will come in September.