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Health care not dead, Rep. Miller vows

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A key voice in the House health insurance legislation negotiations has vowed to keep fighting for the beleaguered bill, decrying what he called a bad strategy of kowtowing to a 60-vote supermajority in the U.S. Senate.

"I think we'll have a bill this year," said Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, after his feisty and occasionally defiant speech to business and other local leaders Monday morning. "I don't know the exact timetable. There are a lot of discussions going on, but I think we will end up getting the votes."

Miller's optimism dovetails with reports out of Washington, D.C., that Democrats are pursuing a strategy in which the House would pass the Senate bill and send it back with amendments to the Senate under the budget reconciliation process, which requires a simple majority.

As chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee and the Democratic Policy Committee, Miller was among leaders who spent more than five hours at the White House with President Barack Obama on Jan. 13 working to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the bill.

Five days later, an upset in the Massachusetts special election dealt the legislation a huge blow when Republican Scott Brown won the Senate seat long held by late Democratic Sen. Edward Kennedy.

Without 60 votes in the Senate, the number needed to avert a filibuster, Democrats lost their momentum.

Many are predicting that Democrats' long quest to adopt universal health insurance, among other changes, will fall off the agenda.

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But Miller told the audience of about 100 members of the Contra Costa Council that President Obama delivered the correct message in last week's state of the union address.

"You don't give up just because it's hard," said Miller, quoting one of the president's admonitions to Congress.

Miller clearly spelled out what has been an ongoing source of House Democrats' unhappiness, and lambasted the Senate's 60-vote rule as an abuse of the nation's majority rule system.

"I think we see the harm of a continued two-thirds vote in California, which is slowly strangling the state," said Miller, referring to California's two-thirds vote requirement to raise taxes or adopt a budget. "I think we need to be able to do the

people's business, no matter what party has the majority. You have to trust the voters."

The imposition of a supermajority hurdle "empowers the weakest people with worst claims," Miller continued.

When lawmakers must have 60 votes in order to debate a bill, Miller said, it foments bad deals such as Nebraska trading its support for an exemption from paying the costs of caring for poor children.

"The minute you go to majority rule, you become more bipartisan," he said. "The extremes know you don't need them."

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Watch video of Rep. George Miller's full speech online at www.ibabuzz.com/politics.



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