

**US Congress passes 'fixes' to landmark health law**  
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The US Congress put the final touches on President Barack Obama's historic health overhaul, passing a set of technical changes to the legislation that will define his political legacy.

Following a 56-43 Senate vote, the House of Representatives on Thursday voted 220-207 for the free-standing package of fixes, four days after approving the underlying bill by a 219-212 margin.

Obama, who triumphantly signed the main measure into law on Tuesday, was expected to sign the changes within days and pursue his efforts to sell the wary US public on the legislation ahead of November mid-term elections.

The newly passed measure does not radically alter the president's plan to extend health coverage to some 32 million Americans who currently lack it, but makes the legislation more politically palatable to the House.

No Senate Republicans voted for the bill, while three Democrats -- Ben Nelson of Nebraska, and Arkansas Senators Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor -- voted against it. Republican Senator Johnny Isakson of Georgia was out sick.

'Reconciliation' changes

The House of Representatives approved the so-called "reconciliation" changes on Sunday after passing the main bill, but Senate Republicans successfully challenged some measures in the smaller measure, forcing another House vote.

On the floor of the House, Republican Representative Mike Pence made a last-gasp appeal to his colleagues to "repeal Obamacare."

Shortly before the vote, Democrat George Miller insisted however that with the bill's passage, "the benefits for Americans start right now."

"We promised to do what's right for the American people, not for insurance companies," he said, adding that the legislation puts health security "in the hands of every American family."

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi brought the gavel down on the final vote at about 9:00 pm (0100 GMT Friday), to cheers and some jeers from the floor.

The overhaul, Obama's top domestic priority, would bring the United States closer than ever to universal coverage and curb insurance company practices like dropping people who get sick and denying coverage for preexisting illnesses.

-AFP