

By Jan Schultz, The Imperial Republican News Editor

Those who may think our state got a Christmas present out of U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson's late night deal last weekend to move along the health care bill, may want to look a little closer at what's inside the package.

Not only did the senator jump ship on his claims that he wouldn't support the bill unless it restricted taxpayer funds for abortion coverage, he brokered what's now being called the "Cornhusker Kickback" for his pivotal 60th vote.

Nelson's "sweet deal" will fund Nebraska's additional Medicaid costs with federal funds instead. Leaders in other states are crying foul, some calling the deal "sleazy."

And, now, Nelson seems to be trying to put Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman in the middle of it, referring to a letter he received from Heineman that complained of the unfunded mandates in the health care bill.

Between the lines, is Nelson actually hinting that Heineman asked for this deal?

Gov. Heineman was all over the news Tuesday, making it pretty clear he and his state don't expect such "deals" that are becoming much too commonplace and "business as usual" in D.C. Nebraskans also don't like the Medicare cuts and tax increases that are part of this health care bill, either.

Frankly, as our representative in Washington, Nelson's "price is right" deal makes it appear Nebraskans approve of such politics. Here's a news flash, Senator—we don't.

Just read the blogs. Some have called Nelson a traitor, and the state's Republicans are taking advantage of the backlash, setting up a www.giveben.theboot.com website to start fundraising for his defeat in 2012.

Our other U.S. senator, Mike Johanns, said he was stunned and disappointed.

Responding to the criticism earlier this week, Nelson said the outrage in Nebraska was "orchestrated," "thinly disguised" and "almost laughable," according to associatedcomment.com. Unfortunately, if he thought this big break is something Nebraskans would approve, then he doesn't know his state's residents very well.

Nebraskans' opinions on the stimulus package Nelson voted for earlier this year also must not have mattered.

I called Nelson's office Monday to see if I could get a staff member to tell me what the percentage was of calls and emails to his office that wanted him to support the Senate's health care bill. All I got was a recorded message that his mailbox was full, and "Good-bye."

It's clearly a disappointment that Nelson chose not to be the smart one here, and say, "Wait a minute. This isn't a bill I can support. Let's work on it more."

Don't for a minute believe that the "changes" made regarding abortion are okay with those who really care about unborn life. Not one pro-life group has come out supporting those changes.

Yes, he got Nebraska a "sweet deal" on the Medicaid costs, which will save millions, but is this how a major piece of legislation should be decided?

If the Senate's health care bill is such a worthy piece of legislation, it should be able to stand on its own merits without backroom deals for Nelson's vote.

Distrust in our politicians is at an all-time high. It's no wonder.

