

10/29/09 4:22 PM EDT

It runs more pages than War and Peace, has nearly five times as many words as the Torah, and its tables of contents alone run far longer than this story.

The [House health care bill](#) unveiled Thursday clocks in at 1,990 pages and about 400,000 words. With an estimated 10-year cost of \$894 billion, that comes out to about \$2.24 million per word. .

And for some members, that [may not be enough](#) .

A "robust" [public option](#) can't be found in the bill. Neither can the word "doctor" - save for a few references to degrees. No "cost curve" is bent. No "blue pill" is dispensed.

"Death" and "taxes" are both in there, but "death panel" is not.

The text defines dozens of words and phrases, including "family" ("an individual and . . . the individual's dependents"), "health insurance coverage," "exchange-eligible individual" and "Indian."

And for those who cry "read the bill," beware. There are plenty of paragraphs like this one:

"(a) Outpatient Hospitals - (1) In General - Section 1833(t)(3)(C)(iv) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395(t)(3)(C)(iv)) is amended - (A) in the first sentence - (i) by inserting "(which is

subject to the productivity adjustment described in subclause (II) of such section)" after "1886(b)(3)(B)(iii); and (ii) by inserting "(but not below 0)" after "reduced"; and (B) in the second sentence, by inserting "and which is subject, beginning with 2010 to the productivity adjustment described in section 1886(b)(3)(B)(iii)(II)".

The section deals with "incorporating productivity improvements into market basket updates that do not already incorporate such improvements," if that helps.

Optimistic lawmakers say it could take a week just to [get through the bill's text](#) .

"I'll have to call an emergency meeting of my staff and drop the customary procedure of me reading and my staff not reading," joked House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers (D-Mich.), who famously told filmmaker Michael Moore that lawmakers "don't read most of the bills."

"It's one thing to read it," said Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.), a lawyer who voted against the first version of the bill on its way through the Energy and Commerce Committee. "It's another thing to understand it when it's written in legalese."

When given the bill's dimensions, Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) noted that some members are faster readers than others.

"That's one afternoon for Barney Frank," he said.

Republicans aide said a print-out of the bill weighs more than 19 pounds and stands nearly nine inches tall.

North Carolina Republican Rep. Patrick McHenry, 34 years old and a few inches taller than 5 feet, said the bill could act as a "booster seat."

Democrats say the [essence of the bill](#) isn't much different from the three sister bills they moved through committees this summer, which came in around 1,000 pages.

If you read those, they say, you pretty much know what's in this one.

"It's almost a complete certainty that we have already discussed and debated almost every element that's in this bill," said Rep. Steve Rothman (D-N.J.)

McHenry took issue with the notion that the 2,000-page bill hasn't changed much from the earlier, 1,000-page versions. To prove the point, he pulled out a Democratic-written summary of the changes.

All eight pages of them.

Asked why the House will vote on the roughly 400,000-word bill in a week when it takes a congregation a year to read the 80,000-word Torah at a synagogue, Rothman, who is Jewish, exhibited the wisdom of a Talmudic scholar.

"It only takes a year because you read one section a week," he said.

But Republican Rep. Joe Barton, who is Texan, said the bill is "about four reams of paper" that add up to the American public "getting reamed."

