

Daschle opposes asbestos reform offer

BI Daily News by [Mark A. Hofmann](#)
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WASHINGTON—Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., appears ready to filibuster an asbestos liability reform bill if it does not undergo significant change.

In a question-and-answer session with Capitol Hill reporters late last week, Sen. Daschle said that a compromise measure offered by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., would not measure up to the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Reform Act, which was passed by the Senate Judiciary Committee in July.

The Frist proposal would cap insurers' responsibility for payouts from a proposed national no-fault fund to compensate victims of asbestos-related diseases at slightly more than \$46 billion, while defendant companies would be responsible for more than \$57 billion and as much as \$10 billion in contingent payments if the fund began running out of money. The original bill would have required insurers and defendant companies to pay out as much as \$22.5 billion in contingent funding in addition to their mandated contributions over the life of the fund. Insurers and defendants have agreed to the Frist funding proposal.

Both Sen. Daschle and organized labor believe the amount of funding provided under the Frist proposal would be inadequate to meet the needs of people suffering from asbestos-related diseases.

Sen. Daschle said he was "disappointed" that Sen. Frist had described his proposal as a "final" offer. Asbestos reform legislation "won't be passed if this is the final offer," said Sen. Daschle. While not specifically committing himself to a filibuster, the Democratic leader said, "we'll do whatever is required to make sure that people are adequately protected."