



Tuesday, August 11, 2009

Commentary

Dingell: Reform health care based on facts

Citizens deserve full, fair debate so bill can save medical system

U.S. Rep. John Dingell

Town hall meetings continue a democratic tradition that goes back more than 2,500 years. In ancient Athens, they held "Ecclesia" or gatherings to discuss and decide civic matters. Great movements have been born from these gatherings of individuals with different ideas working to forge consensus.

Last Thursday, I held two town hall meetings in Romulus to discuss a matter of the utmost importance -- health care reform. The large turnout made me very happy. I want to hear from opponents and supporters of the legislation.

More important, I need to hear people's specific concerns and the changes they want. In fact, my desire to hear from my constituents is so strong that while only one town hall was planned, I actually added the second that evening to hear from as many people as possible. That is what makes better legislation. I strongly believe the vast majority of the people in that room had legitimate concerns and questions. Sadly, they were denied the opportunity because some refused to let others speak and were only there to disrupt.

I want to hear from my constituents, but also explain that by lowering costs, improving quality and giving more choices to Americans, we can save both our health care system and economy.

The impending collapse of our health care system is one of the most important questions facing our nation, and full, free and fair debate is urgently needed. Here are the facts. The bill would:

- End the practice of denying insurance because of pre-existing conditions.
- Not allow termination of insurance if you become seriously ill.
- Preclude exorbitant out-of-pocket expenses, deductibles or co-pays.
- End annual or lifetime caps on coverage.
- Provide guaranteed oral, hearing and vision care for kids.
- Allow people to keep their doctor and their plan if they wish, while also creating more choices of insurance plans.
- Eliminate lifetime limits on health insurance coverage.

Unfortunately, the fiction about this bill is getting more attention than the facts. This bill will *not* do the following:

- Will *not* lead to employers discontinuing health care coverage in favor of government coverage. Based on an analysis by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, H.R. 3200 will actually increase the number of people who get health insurance coverage through an employer compared with current law.
- Will *not* create an undue burden for small businesses. According to the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation, 96 percent of small businesses will pay no additional fees under the bill. In fact, small businesses will benefit from tax credits to empower them to provide health insurance for their employees. Small businesses are now paying 18 percent more than big businesses for the same policy; we will stop this unfair practice.
- Will *not* exempt members of Congress. Our health care plan will be subject to the same rules as all other employer-sponsored plans.
- Will *not* cover illegal immigrants, leaving American citizens to pay for it. Section 246 of H.R. 3200 specifically prohibits federal funds from being spent to cover illegal immigrants.
- Will *not* lead to government-sponsored euthanasia. This bill provides an option for individuals to discuss life-extending measures under various scenarios and for Medicare to cover the cost. It is entirely the individual's choice; it does not require anyone to use the benefit and it does not penalize those who don't. Patients and their families would consult with health professionals, not government officials, if they choose to use the benefit.
- Will *not* lead to government-sponsored abortions. An amendment was added in the Energy and Commerce Committee that explicitly states no public money can be used to

fund abortions.

We will continue to maximize the opportunities throughout August for real and honest dialogue with those who have opinions, fears and questions. What we hope for is continued passionate involvement by many people in a civil environment. Democracy is at its best when this occurs.

U.S. Rep. John Dingell, D-Dearborn, is the chairman emeritus of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. E-mail comments to letters@detnews.com.