



Minnesota House Republicans

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HOUSE REPUBLICANS UNVEIL HEALTH CARE REFORM INITIATIVES

SAINT PAUL – (December 11, 2007) -- Freedom and Choice. Privacy and Security. No Government Takeover of Health Care. These are the core principles of the health care plan unveiled today by the Minnesota House Republicans.

"Cost containment and affordability are key factors in the debate on health care reform," said House Republican Leader Marty Seifert. "However, free choice and consumer protection of medical data must also be addressed as parallel tracks. Our reform initiatives support consumer freedom and privacy, not a Big Brother single payer system of rationing owned and operated by the government."

Health care is anticipated to be a major topic during the 2008 legislative session. Seifert said he and other members of the House Republican Caucus have traveled throughout their districts, held town meetings, and listened to people's concerns. While many people expressed their concerns with the rising costs of health care and their ability to pay their premiums and afford quality health care, there was much concern over movement toward a government run system.

"Putting people into state and federal subsidized health care is not reform. It is not the cure for the rising costs of health care, nor is it a guarantee that consumers will continued to have access to quality health care," declares Seifert. "They must be engaged in taking responsibility for their own health. Government subsidies can not keep up with cost increases. Either taxes will increase dramatically or services will be rationed and waiting lists will become common if the government becomes the principal payer.

The Republican reform initiatives are steps that are driven by consumers and the marketplace. The initiatives aim to identify solutions that provide more choice and better health while making healthcare more affordable.

"People need to be in charge of their own health. They have been insulated from real decision-making," said Representative Jim Abeler, Republican lead on the Health and Human Services Finance Committee. "And they need to be able to afford their health care. Lasik eye surgery costs have come down over the years because insurance didn't pay and people had to shop around. Quality was maintained and costs dropped. That is success. This debate must focus on empowering consumers with information and freedom to make choices. The health care system is starting to respond, even as the Lasik model has proven it to be possible."

Seifert said the 21st century health care system could look much different and be much worse than the system people know today. He said government takeover of individual freedom and responsibility would be a huge step backwards in providing quality, accessible and affordable health care.

"Any reform measure must focus first on the individual and be based on real choices. There is no bona-fide market in health care. For some people health care seems free but we are becoming painfully aware that somebody has to pay," Seifert said. "Increased choice, transparent pricing and shopping consumers will help drive down costs."

Approximately 7.4% of Minnesotans lack health insurance. Approximately one-half of them are already eligible for Minnesota state programs. It is estimated that another one-third would be able to be covered under the Republican plan. It is estimated that the actions outlined by House Republicans will help stop the erosion of those who currently have coverage where increasing costs are driving employers and individuals to discontinue coverage. Industry experts have stated that the uninsured who consistently refuse to accept or who don't need coverage will hover around 2 to 3 percent.

"Reform must ultimately rely on a market solution, not moving people into a state-sponsored program," Seifert said. "There are some individuals who need our help, and we need to help them. However, just enrolling more people does absolutely nothing to reduce the cost of health care. We have to address the disease to prevent the symptoms, and not just keep on giving away Band-Aids."



FREEDOM AND CHOICE

- + It is a matter of personal responsibility to control your own health care.
- + Patients should be allowed to choose their health plan and doctor, and have a say in their care.
- + No mandate requiring everyone to have insurance.
- + Allow nationwide purchasing of any approved health care plan. This will promote nationwide competition, innovative plans, and lessened costs.
- + Provide individual tax credits/deductions to promote non-employer coverage, on a sliding scale.
- + Promote and expand information on cost of services and quality of care available to consumers.

PRIVACY AND SECURITY

- + Require patient consent to disseminate medical records.
- + Create a medical data bank in the consumer's wallet with e-health care cards with medical information. No hackers, no prying eyes on private information.
- + Portability is increased with individual insurance policies so consumers won't lose insurance if they lose their jobs.
- + Promote and enhance ongoing market-based reforms including evidence-based and value-oriented medical information.
- + Create a tort court to assure quality of care, minimize defensive medicine, provide fair compensation to injured parties, standardize patient expectations and provider practices, and preserve statewide access to emergency room and obstetric services.

NO GOVERNMENT TAKE OVER OF HEALTH CARE

- + No government-directed rationing and no "Big Brother" decisions.
- + No months-long waiting lines like in Canada and Europe.
- + Maintain a safety net for those in need. Promote greater results in state programs, which will spill over into the private sector.
- + Make it easier for personal purchase of insurance where possible. Optional section 125 plans should be made easily available through agents, brokers and a voluntary Insurance Exchange.
- + Shift state plan enrollees where possible to private plans via health care vouchers and/or tax credits.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

- + Reduce growth rate in Health and Human Services to the rate of inflation for one biennium. The Department functions are so vast that no one person can know all the overlaps and duplicated services that exist.
- + Create a statewide process to prioritize Human Services funding to address essential and important needs.
- + Use that source to fund tax credits, tax deductions, repeal of health taxes, including the Provider Tax, and other pressing needs, like the gap created by the Federal rule changes on targeted case management.
- + Increased consumer responsibility and engagement creates increased market pressure on prices and quality and reduces costs and increases quality, increasing affordability.
- + Follow the law: no increased state funding for illegal immigrants.