

Bilirakis Op-Ed: Health Care Solutions

Health Care Solutions
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"I want everyone to have access to quality, affordable health care." It is a line uttered by members of Congress on both ends of the political spectrum. But what does it mean when you get down to the nuts and bolts of reforming the nation's health care system?

We all know that in this troubled economy, families are increasingly worried about making ends meet and ensuring they are covered in the event of a health care emergency. That's why Congress must take action to make health insurance more affordable.

However, I completely disagree that we should raise taxes and cut care for seniors to put the government in control of the system. The current House plan calls for \$500 billion in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid over the next 10 years and places a stifling new tax of up to 5.4 percent on small businesses.

This misguided experiment will kill jobs, while the more than \$1 trillion price tag will add over \$200 billion to our ever-growing deficit.

There are other more sensible options that will lower costs and increase access to insurance while preserving the doctor-patient relationship and keeping you in charge of your care. Unfortunately, the bill being rushed through Congress short-changes these common-sense solutions, which I support:

- Expanding community health centers. They increase access to high-quality primary and preventive care that people can afford. Congress should increase their funding, which currently provides effective and affordable primary care services to over 18 million people each year - more than 7 million without insurance.

- Strengthening association health plans. Improving the buying power of employers to join together and provide affordable health coverage, as they currently do for more than two-thirds of Americans, will reduce the number of uninsured workers. We should allow individuals to purchase health insurance on their own, or through their civic clubs, church or fraternal organizations, across state lines so they have access to less costly policies.

- Enacting medical liability reform. Health care costs are going to remain too high as long as physicians are practicing defensive medicine, ordering unnecessary and expensive tests and procedures, because they are scared of getting sued. Reasonable limits on non-economic damages would discourage frivolous lawsuits that are artificially inflating health care costs.

- Encouraging preventive care. We simply must lower health care costs system-wide to significantly lower the cost of health care. We can do that by providing financial incentives for people to stay healthy and get treatment when they first need it, before illnesses progress and become more serious and costly.

- Reforming long-term care. Health reform is doomed to fail unless we reduce the cost of long-term care both for patients and government.

- Increasing transparency in prices. You would never buy a car without shopping around. Health care would be much more affordable if consumers were able to determine how much their care really costs and could comparison shop for treatments and medicine.

- Eliminating waste, fraud and abuse in federal health programs. Industry estimates are that as much as 10 percent of all health care spending is fraudulent. Simply streamlining delivery and stopping payments for care that is not or should not be provided will save billions.

"I want everyone to have access to quality, affordable health care." But let's not do it in a way that will limit choices, diminish quality, increase wait times or put federal bureaucrats in charge of decisions that should be between you and your doctor.

Rep. Gus Bilirakis, a Republican, represents the 9th Congressional District, which includes parts of Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties.

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