

Bob Dole



NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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HEALTH CARE DEBATE

OPENING STATEMENT OF

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER BOB DOLE

America has the best health care system in the world.
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I repeat it three times now, because I am worried the actions we take in the days ahead will mean those words are no longer true.

I have experienced the miracle of health care in America. Had I returned from World War II to any other nation, I don't know what would have happened to me.

And although it was large to me, mine was just one small miracle among the millions that save and improve and prolong the lives of Americans, every day, every year. What makes those miracles possible is the American commitment to the freedom of individuals and the freedom of markets.

There is something else I know from first-hand experience. The fact that there is nothing worse than being unable to afford health care for yourself or your family.

Republicans understand there are Americans in need.

Republicans want to help.

Republicans have been working for a year and a half for a bipartisan health care reform plan.

The plan sponsored by Senator Packwood, myself, and 38 other Republican Senators -- which we introduce today -- will make our system more affordable and more accessible to millions of Americans.

The White House and perhaps some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle want everybody to believe that only they are for improving our system...that only they are for "the little guy," and that Republicans are for the status quo.

The truth is that Republicans do want to help Americans in need.

The truth is that we want to help those who can't afford health care insurance.

The truth is that we want to help those who are blocked from buying insurance because of a pre-existing condition.

And the truth is that Republicans think we can make health care more affordable and more accessible without new taxes, without government mandates, without having the government tell you what will be included in your health insurance, and without putting federal bureaucrats in charge of our health care system.

This debate is far too important to the future of the American people to degenerate into false accusations and partisan bickering. And it is too important to complete in a rushed and haphazard manner.

Important Questions

How important is it? Well, just look at the some of the questions that we will be answering:

Will we trade in a health care system based on individual freedom, for one based on government control?

Will countless small businesses be forced to close their doors and countless more working Americans lose their jobs because of government mandates?

Will Americans be able to choose a health insurance policy that meets their budget and their needs, or will a federal bureaucrat tell us how much we will pay, and what coverage we will receive?

Will millions of middle class Americans see their insurance rates skyrocket to the point where they can no longer afford the coverage they have now?

Will most of our people be forced to pay still more taxes? Will they receive less care?

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Will we threaten our children's future by piling on untold billions of dollars to our national deficit, through the creation of huge new entitlements.

Will there be enough specialists trained in our medical schools? Will you be free to seek them out, wherever they may be?

Will hospitals in our rural areas and in our inner cities have the resources to thrive?

And perhaps the most important question of all: Will the actions we take decrease the quality of care that Americans have come to expect, and decrease the ability of our doctors, our hospitals, and our research facilities to produce the miracles that have made our system the best in the world.

Any one of these questions would deserve a very careful and lengthy debate. But with health care reform, we're not talking about just one. We're talking about all of them and more.

"Informed Consent"

Before a patient has surgery or is given some new experimental treatment, the doctor must explain in plain English the treatment's benefits, risks, costs, and alternatives.

This is called "informed consent," and it is crucial to the trust between a doctor and a patient.

Health care reform is an experimental treatment, too, and if there is to be any trust between our government and the public, then the public must have a chance to grant or to not grant their informed consent.

Has the American public had an opportunity to offer their "informed consent" on the Clinton/Mitchell bill? Nobody could honestly answer that question with a "yes."

There have been no hearings on this bill. No experts have testified. In fact, the bill changes almost hourly as provisions are inserted and removed in a quest for 51 votes.

The White House and the Democrat leadership are afraid--as they should be--that if Americans have the time to understand the repercussions of this bill, then they will refuse to grant their "informed consent."

President Clinton's Bill

That's precisely what happened with the health care reform bill proposed by President Clinton.

I can't remember a piece of legislation receiving as much media coverage as the President's bill. It was discussed and debated and dissected in town hall meetings and kitchen table discussions across the country.

And something happened as the weeks and months went by. Despite the fact that the President and the First Lady had the full use of the White House bully pulpit, and despite the fact that they are both very eloquent, public support for the Clinton plan did nothing but go down and down and down.

Finally, as we all know, just a few weeks ago, Senator Mitchell, Speaker Foley, and Congressman Gephardt, went to the White House to tell the President that the American people would not buy his program.

And now Senator Mitchell wants the American public to buy his. He wants the American public to "trade in" the best health care system in the world for something else.

The Clinton/Mitchell Plan:

Mandates, Taxes, Entitlements & Government Control

And in the days and weeks ahead, Republicans will be inviting Americans to inspect that something else. To kick its tires. To look under its hood. And when they do, they'll discover that it is the Clinton plan with a new coat of paint and a rolled back odometer.

Job killing mandates? They were at the core of the original Clinton proposal, and are in this one--only put off for six years. But in the words of Herman Cain, the CEO of Godfather's Pizza, "It doesn't matter whether you kill me now or whether you phase in death over a period of time."

Taxes? They were all over President Clinton's failed plan, and this bill is still chock full of them. By our estimate, it imposes seventeen or so new taxes totaling billions of dollars. It may be less, it probably is more..but nobody knows for sure.

Another similarity between the President's plan and the Mitchell plan is massive new entitlements. What is the exact cost of these entitlements, which may be given to over 100 million Americans? How we will pay for them? Again, nobody knows for sure.

But I believe the most important far reaching similarity between the President's original proposal and the Mitchell bill is the fact that they are based on the same principle. The principle that government knows best.

(more)

Under the Clinton/Mitchell proposal, the federal government will have broad and sweeping new powers in almost every aspect of health care.

Under this plan, the government will have the power to tell Americans precisely what will be in their health insurance policy, by mandating a one-size fits all standard benefits package.

The government will have the power to mandate that all Americans pay the same price for insurance, whether you are young, old, healthy or not so healthy. And for a lot of people that means higher rates.

The government will have the power to tell medical schools how many specialists they can train each year.

And through a seven-member Presidentially appointed "National Health Board," the government will have the power to determine "medical necessity." In plain English, that means federal bureaucrats, and not you and your doctor, will determine what type of treatment you receive, and whether you will receive it at all.

Now, Senator Mitchell's bill is not all bad. Parts of it do make our system more affordable and accessible.

And so does legislation which is sponsored by Senator Packwood, myself, and 38 other Republicans.

"The American Option"

We call our bill "The American Option." Not the Democrat Option or the Republican Option. But the American Option.

And it helps those Americans who are unable to afford health care insurance. It helps those who are unable to get insurance because of a pre-existing condition. It makes insurance more affordable for small businesses. And it does much more. And we'll be talking about the American Option throughout this debate.

Don't get me wrong. There are quite a few things you'll find in the Clinton/Mitchell Bill that you won't find in our proposal.

You won't find any new taxes. You won't find mandates. You won't find price controls. You won't find a National Health Board. You won't find a one-size-fits all government written standard benefits package.

You won't find these because our bill is not based on the principle that government knows best. Rather, it's based on the principle that the American people know best.

Areas of Bipartisan Agreement

I have asked time and again throughout this debate, "Why not take the areas where there is universal, overwhelming bipartisan agreement, put them all together in a bill, pass it into law, and thereby make insurance more affordable and more accessible for millions of Americans?"

We could have done it a year ago. We could have done it six months ago. And we could do it today. And then we can take a look next year to see if those reforms are working and act if there are still more Americans we need to help.

Unfortunately, however, the President and the Democrat leadership have refused to consider that idea. The President and the Democrat leadership are rolling the dice in what could be the gamble of the century. They believe this is their one opportunity to bring government-run health care to America.

What a tragedy it would be if Americans in need are denied help because the White House insists that the only bill they will accept is one that turns our health care system over to the federal government.

Let me conclude by saying again that Republicans stand ready--as we have throughout this debate--to make our health care system more affordable and accessible.

But we also stand ready to challenge legislation--like the Clinton/Mitchell bill--that could well deny our children and generations yet to come the ability to say--as we so proudly can-- "America has the best health care system in the world."

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