

Bob Dole



**NEWS
FROM:**

**U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS
SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER**

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HEALTH CARE REFORM

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER BOB DOLE REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Throughout the past year and a half, the A.E.I. has played an active role in the health care debate, so I'm pleased to have the chance to meet with you again as we approach the finish line.

Let me cut right to the chase. I know the question on everyone's mind is will Congress pass health care reform legislation this year?

Health Care Reform: Approaching the Finish Line

The answer is I don't know. And nobody knows. Not because we haven't had plenty of meetings on this subject. Not because there aren't good ideas out there. But because there still isn't a bill with enough votes to pass.

The Clinton bill was formally buried last week. So that's out.

And if you thought nothing could be worse than the Clinton bill, along came the Kennedy bill, which was passed by the Senate Labor Committee. Like the Clinton bill, it has too many taxes, too many mandates, and too much regulation. It was a non-starter from the word go, and not even Senator Kennedy ever had a realistic hope it would come close to passing.

Then there's the bill passed by the Senate Finance Committee. It's been almost a month since the bill was passed out of Committee, and it's still not drafted. No one knows exactly what's in it or what it costs. And the American people haven't exactly been flooding Congress with phone calls in support of the bill.

The Dole-Packwood plan has more support than any bill in the Senate--with more co-sponsors to come. Obviously, I believe it is the best bill up there. And if the Senate could vote by secret ballot, I believe it would be overwhelmingly adopted. But it doesn't take a political science professor to figure out that a Congress controlled by the Democrats is not going to pass legislation authored by the Senate Republican Leader.

Democrats' Back Room Tactics

So that leaves the "mystery bill"--which is being cobbled together as we speak behind closed doors by House and Senate Democrat leaders. Maybe some of you have been invited in for briefings or have been on the receiving end of some leaks. If so, please raise you hand and fill me in.

It is unfortunate that this process is ending as it began--in secret, and without bi-partisan cooperation.

As you remember, the Clinton plan was written in the White House War Room. Republicans offered to help, and we were turned down flat.

It wasn't until October 27, 1993 that the Clinton administration finally completed the drafting process and transmitted the bill to Congress.

And the first poll of the American people indicated that 64% of the American people supported the plan and only 30% opposed it.

Then the President, the First Lady, and the entire administration fanned out across American in support of the plan.

And you know what happened. The more the American people learned about the plan, the less they liked it. They didn't like the complexity. They didn't like the mountain of bureaucrats between them and their doctors. They didn't like the price controls. They didn't like mandatory alliances. And they certainly didn't like the taxes.

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And shortly before the plan was scrapped, support for the Clinton plan had dropped all the way to just 37% and was heading south, while opposition had climbed to 49%.

Now, the American people are holding their breath, waiting to see what comes out of this new round of secret meetings.

Finish Journey in Bi-Partisan Form

I happen to believe that if it's anywhere close to the product the President tried to sell, then the American people--the Republicans in Congress--and some Democrats, as well--won't buy it.

But I also believe that if they choose to fix the parts of our system that truly need fixing...and if they maintain the quality and choice Americans have come to expect, then we can still send a bill to the President's desk this fall.

If that is to be the finish line, however, then we have to travel down the remainder of the road in a bi-partisan basis. And we can't spend our time getting detoured onto paths that only lead to confrontation.

Unfortunately, we've had a lot of those detours during this debate. The White House decided for a while that this wasn't a search for solutions, it was a search for villains--and they took off after the insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

And then we wasted several weeks debating whether or not we had a health care crisis or just a serious problem. And the White House suggested that if you didn't believe we had a crisis, then you couldn't participate in the debate, and weren't qualified to help find a solution.

Then, the White House and the DNC decided that this isn't a debate about policies, it's a debate about personalities. It's Bill Clinton vs. Bob Dole. It's Democrats vs. Republicans. It's a debate about which party cares more about the "middle class."

"Silent Majority" Wants Real Reform

I never have liked the term middle class. I think President Nixon had it right when he used the term "silent majority."

They are the men and women who work hard, who pay their taxes, who hope for a better future for their children, and who salute the flag. They believe in the greatness of America--a greatness which they know comes not from the government, but from the people.

Dole-Packwood Plan: What Americans Are Looking For

And here's what I believe these Americans are looking for in health care reform. And, by the way, they are the same ingredients that I believe must be included if any legislation is to receive substantial bi-partisan support.

Quality: America is the medical miracle worker of the world. Thanks to advances in technology, we can save the lives of the smallest new born, can manufacture just about every body part, and have developed drugs that make life worth living for many who previously had no hope. And whatever reform we adopt, must not lessen the quality of american health care by one degree.

Choice: Just as Americans want to maintain the quality of health care, they also want to maintain the freedom to choose what type of care best fits their needs.

Any plan that mandates a "one size fits all" or Clinton-style uniformity is a non-starter.

Taxes/mandates: Another non-starter is any plan that contains big, big, tax increases.

And when I say taxes, I also mean mandates. Because a mandate is a tax. And by mandating America's employers to pay for health insurance, the cost of labor goes up. The employer then has two choices. Raise the price of your product, or reduce your payroll. Either of these options is bad news for middle-income Americans.

The good news is that the Dole-Packwood plan does not impose a single tax or a single mandate on America's employers--not today, not tomorrow, not any time in the future.

There are many areas of agreement between all the plans that have been proposed--portability, pre-existing conditions, and other insurance market reforms.

Congress could and should have passed these reforms a year ago, and if we can't agree on anything else we should still pass them.

I can't predict precisely what will happen in the next few weeks. But I do know that Senator Byrd made a very compelling point on the Senate floor yesterday.

Senator Byrd said, "Nothing less than the health, financial security, and the very lives of millions of people are being dealt with when we start to consider radical changes in the health care system of this nation...We had better do whatever we are going to do with great care...A botched job of reform could be disastrous...So I urge everyone on all sides of this debate to pipe

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down, slow down, pause, and get serious about the monumental task which lies ahead...This is no time for sloppy legislating."

Republican Commitment to World's Best Health Care System

So that's where we are on health care. And I believe the most important thing for the Republican party in the coming weeks is that we remain true to our principles.

The mission of our party is not just to cut the Democrats programs in half, or meet them somewhere in the middle. But the mission of our party is also not to close our eyes to people who need help. So if the President and the Democrats come our way...if they want a market-based approach that builds on the best health care system in the world, and that leaves people in charge, then Republicans will help.

But if they want to pass a bad bill, then this Republican will say that no bill is better, and we'll take it to the voters this November.

That's my prediction of what lies ahead. But before I take questions, let me leave you with the words of Winston Churchill. Someone asked Churchill what qualifications were essential for a politician. And he said, "The ability to foretell what will happen tomorrow, next month, and next year--and the ability to explain afterwards why it didn't happen."

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