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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

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GOP HEALTH CARE BILL

REJECT GOVERNMENT MANDATES & CRIPPLING TAXES ON SMALL BUSINESS;
RURAL HEALTH CARE REFORM A PRIORITY IN REPUBLICAN ALTERNATIVE

ONE YEAR AGO, SENATE REPUBLICANS FORMED A HEALTH CARE TASK FORCE, ABLY CHAIRED BY THE DISTINGUISHED SENATOR FROM RHODE ISLAND, SENATOR CHAFEE.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT, HEALTHCARE IS AT THE TOP OF THE LIST WHEN IT COMES TO NATIONAL PRIORITIES. SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, I PREDICTED THAT HEALTH CARE WOULD BE THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE IN THE 1992 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, AND JUDGING BY THE INTENSIFYING FOCUS ON HEALTH CARE, IT LOOKS LIKE MY PREDICTION IS COMING TRUE.

EVERY AMERICAN KNOWS FIRSTHAND THAT HEALTH CARE COSTS HAVE RUN AMOK. THE NUMBER OF UNINSURED HAS GROWN. AND THE MIDDLE CLASS ARE GETTING MORE AND MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SECURITY AND AFFORDABILITY OF HEALTH CARE. WHEN I READ RECENT POLLS INDICATING THAT 90% OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE FEEL OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM NEEDS FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE, I BELIEVE IT.

IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN A PRIORITY ISSUE WITH THOSE OF US FROM RURAL STATES WHERE ACCESS TO QUALITY CARE IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE CHALLENGING, AND IN SOME PLACES ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. LET'S FACE IT, HEALTHCARE IS NOT AN ISSUE THAT SUDDENLY POPPED-UP THIS WEEK. I HAVE BEEN IMMERSSED IN THIS ISSUE THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF MY CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE, AS HAVE MANY OTHERS IN THIS CHAMBER.

THE #1 PRIORITY IN KANSAS

I HAVE JUST COMPLETED A YEAR-LONG TOUR OF ALL 105 COUNTIES IN KANSAS. AFTER HUNDREDS OF TOWN MEETING AND VISITS WITH KANSAS OFFICIALS, I CAN TELL THE SENATE TODAY THAT HEALTH CARE IS THE PRIORITY CONCERN IN MY HOME STATE. THAT UNANIMOUS MESSAGE DOES NOT COME AS ANY SURPRISE, BUT IT DOES UNDERSCORE THE FACT THAT DESPITE THE BEST EFFORTS OF REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS DURING THE PAST DECADES, THE PROBLEM REMAINS.

REFORM PROPOSALS TO REVAMP THE CURRENT SYSTEM ARE IN NO SHORT SUPPLY -- THERE'S PLENTY OF ACCESS TO THEM. MY LATEST COUNT IS 24. THERE'S ALSO BEEN A FLOOD OF REFORM PROPOSALS THAT HAVE POURED OUT OF BUSINESS, LABOR, MEDICAL, INSURANCE, AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS.

BUT CONVENTIONAL WISDOM AMONG GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY EXPERTS SAYS THAT MEANINGFUL, COMPREHENSIVE REFORM IS AT LEAST 3 TO 5 YEARS AWAY.

WHAT'S BLOCKING ACTION? THERE'S A LOT OF FINGER-POINTING GOING ON RIGHT NOW. DEMOCRATS POINT TO THE WHITE HOUSE. OTHERS POINT TO A DEMOCRAT-CONTROLLED CONGRESS. DOCTORS POINT TO THE LAWYERS. INSURANCE COMPANIES POINT TO WASTEFUL HOSPITALS AND DOCTORS WHO CHARGE TOO MUCH. SMALL BUSINESS POINTS TO THE INSURANCE COMPANIES. INTEREST GROUPS POINT TO A LACK OF CONSENSUS. EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT THE HOW COMPLEX THE ISSUE IS. AND MEANWHILE, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WATCH IN FRUSTRATION AS THEIR COVERAGE DWINDLES, OR EVEN DISAPPEARS IN SOME CASES, AND COSTS GO HIGHER AND HIGHER.

A BILL THAT CAN BECOME LAW

IT'S TIME TO STOP POINTING FINGERS -- THERE'S PLENTY OF BLAME TO GO AROUND -- AND IT'S TIME TO REALLY DO SOMETHING. I DON'T MEAN IT'S TIME TO JUST TALK ABOUT DOING SOMETHING, I MEAN, IT'S TIME TO INTRODUCE A BILL THAT WILL ACTUALLY PASS -- THAT WILL HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS -- FROM MEMBERS ON BOTH SIDES -- AND THAT WILL BECOME LAW.

TODAY MY REPUBLICAN COLLEAGUES AND I ARE INTRODUCING A BILL THAT I THINK HAS A FIGHTING CHANCE OF DOING JUST THAT.

FOR THE PAST YEAR, OUR REPUBLICAN TASK FORCE MET EVERY WEEK SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO CURB THE EVER-RISING HEALTH CARE COSTS, AND TO EXPAND ACCESS FOR THE MILLIONS OF AMERICANS NOW WITHOUT INSURANCE.

OUR DISCUSSIONS HAVE BEEN FRANK AND COMPREHENSIVE. DID WE AGREE ON EVERY POINT? OF COURSE NOT. HAVE WE SOLVED THE CRISIS? NOT COMPLETELY. BUT WHAT WE HAVE DONE IS PUT TOGETHER A MEANINGFUL PACKAGE THAT WILL IMPROVE HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICANS.

WE MUST REMEMBER, COMPREHENSIVE, SWEEPING REFORM IS GOING TO TAKE SOME TIME. ANYONE WHO SAYS IT WILL HAPPEN OVERNIGHT IS GOING TO BE VERY DISAPPOINTED.

(MORE)

REPUBLICAN INCENTIVES VS. CRIPPLING DEMOCRAT MANDATES & EMPLOYER TAXES

THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO RESTRUCTURE THE SYSTEM ARE JUST NOT THERE. SIMPLY PUT, THE GOVERNMENT IS BROKE. AND MOST OF THE STATES ARE RUNNING IN THE RED AS WELL. THAT'S WHY THE DEMOCRATS KEEP TALKING ABOUT TAXING BUSINESS -- BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT THOSE "PAY OR PLAY" PROPOSALS REALLY ARE -- A TAX ON BUSINESS.

IF IT'S AMERICA'S INTENTION TO BANKRUPT THE EMPLOYERS OF OUR NATION, PARTICULARLY SMALL EMPLOYERS, SOME OF WHICH ARE ALREADY OPERATING ON THE MARGIN -- THEN THE DEMOCRATS' BILL IS THE RIGHT SOLUTION. OR IF IT'S OUR INTENTION TO RAVAGE THE ECONOMY AND FORCE PEOPLE OUT OF WORK -- THEN THE PROPOSALS WE'VE SEEN COME FORWARD BY THE DEMOCRATS ARE THE RIGHT SOLUTION.

BUT, I DOUBT THAT IS WHAT MOST AMERICANS WANT TO SEE. OUR GOAL IS TO CURB RUNAWAY HEALTH CARE COSTS THAT ARE CONSUMING MORE AND MORE OF OUR GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT. OUR GOAL IS A HEALTH CARE SYSTEM ACCESSIBLE TO ALL AMERICANS. AND OUR GOAL IS TO HAVE HEALTH CARE REFORM THAT PRESERVES THE ASSETS OF OUR SYSTEM -- ASSETS WE OFTEN DON'T HEAR ABOUT -- SUCH AS UNPARALLELED HIGH QUALITY HEALTH CARE DELIVERED BY OUR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS.

THE MOST CRITICAL ELEMENT OF THE PROPOSAL BEFORE YOU IS THE USE OF INCENTIVES VERSUS MANDATES. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT, GIVEN THE CHANCE, SMALL BUSINESS, THE SELF-EMPLOYED, AND MANY INDIVIDUALS WILL SEEK TO PROTECT THEMSELVES OR THEIR EMPLOYEES. OUR BILL WILL DO THAT THROUGH THE USE OF TAX CREDITS AND REFORMS IN SMALL MARKET INSURANCE.

ADDITIONALLY, OUR BILL RECOGNIZES THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING US. SOME PEOPLE CAN BE HELPED THROUGH THE USE OF TAX CREDITS. OTHERS WILL BENEFIT THROUGH THE EXPANSION OF THE COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC PROGRAM, WHILE STILL OTHERS WILL AVAIL THEMSELVES OF COVERAGE UNDER THE STATE PUBLICLY FINANCED PROGRAM.

RURAL HEALTH CARE & COST CONTAINMENT

I SHOULD ALSO NOTE THAT THERE IS SPECIAL ATTENTION GIVEN TO THE REAL NEEDS OF RURAL POPULATIONS. OUR BILL NOT ONLY INCREASES THE FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINICS, IT ALSO INCREASES FUNDING FOR THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE CORPS, WHICH WILL TRANSLATE INTO MORE HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS FOR RURAL AREAS.

OUR BILL ALSO FEATURES SOME INNOVATIVE PROVISIONS TO CONTAIN SKYROCKETING COSTS. WE BELIEVE THAT \$15 BILLION COULD BE SAVED EACH YEAR BY REFORM OF THE MEDICAL LIABILITY LAWS. WE'VE ALSO MADE PROVISIONS FOR SMALL MARKET INSURANCE REFORM AND THE CREATION OF PURCHASING GROUPS.

THESE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE INNOVATIONS INCLUDED IN OUR BILL. AS A GROUP, THE TASK FORCE HAD TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO JUNK THE ENTIRE SYSTEM AND SIMPLY START FROM SCRATCH. IT ALSO REJECTED RADICAL REFORMS WHICH HAVE NO CHANCE OF PASSING. I BELIEVE OUR APPROACH IS BOTH REASONABLE AND RESPONSIBLE.

I ALSO WOULD LIKE TO NOTE THAT WHILE THE PROPOSAL WE ARE INTRODUCING TODAY FOCUSES ON ACUTE CARE SERVICES, LONG-TERM CARE IS STILL A PRIORITY.

IN AUGUST, SENATOR PACKWOOD AND I INTRODUCED A LONG-TERM CARE BILL THAT ADDRESSES THE NEEDS OF MANY OF OUR OLDER AMERICANS. IT PROVIDES FOR BOTH HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED LONG-TERM CARE SERVICES, AS WELL AS NURSING HOME CARE. AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVES ACCESS TO LONG-TERM CARE FOR A LARGER SEGMENT OF OUR SENIOR POPULATION. UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE YET TO SEE ANY ACTION ON OUR PROPOSAL.

PAYING THE TAB FOR REFORM

AND NOW, LET ME TURN TO THE TOUGHEST QUESTION OF ALL, THE QUESTION MOST PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT: HOW ARE WE GOING TO PAY FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM?

YOU CAN BE CERTAIN, THAT REPUBLICANS ARE FULLY COMMITTED TO SEEKING A RESPONSIBLE FINANCING MECHANISM. ONE AREA THAT LOOKS PARTICULARLY PROMISING TO ME IS THE IMPOSITION OF A REASONABLE LIMIT ON THE TAX DEDUCTIBILITY OF HEALTH BENEFITS PROVIDED BY EMPLOYERS.

OUR CURRENT SYSTEM OF UNLIMITED TAX-FREE HEALTH BENEFITS NOT ONLY STRIPS AWAY INCENTIVES TO CONTAIN COSTS AND TO CONSUME CAUTIOUSLY, IT ALSO RESULTS IN A LOSS OF REVENUE TO THE U. S. TREASURY OF ALMOST \$40 BILLION PER YEAR. THIS IS ONLY ONE FINANCING MECHANISM THAT IS A VIABLE OPTION. THERE ARE OTHERS. I AM CONFIDENT THAT A RESPONSIBLE FINANCING MECHANISM WILL BE FOUND. AND, I CAN ASSURE YOU, IT WILL BE DONE WITHOUT BREAKING THE BACKS OF THE TAXPAYERS BY ADDING TO OUR RECORD-BREAKING FEDERAL DEFICIT.

I REALIZE THAT OUR BILL TODAY DOES NOT SOLVE ALL OF OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM'S SHORTCOMINGS. BUT I BELIEVE IT SIGNIFICANTLY MOVES US FORWARD IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION TOWARD GREATER ACCESS WITH DECISIVE COST CONTAINMENT MEASURES. WHAT IT DOES NOT DO IS HAVE THE GOVERNMENT CRUSHING AMERICANS WITH NEW REGULATIONS, HUGE DEFICITS, OR MASSIVE TAX INCREASES.

IT IS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE CANADIAN SYSTEM THAT SOME SEEMED TO BE SO FASCINATED WITH. IT IS ALSO QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE LEADING DEMOCRATIC PROPOSALS WITH ALL OF THEIR MANDATES AND BIG TICKET BOTTOMLINES.

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A HEALTH CARE BILL THAT WILL ACTUALLY HELP THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, WITHOUT WREAKING HAVOC ON THE ECONOMY, I THINK THIS BILL LOOKS PRETTY GOOD. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO EXPAND THE GOVERNMENT AND WEAKEN WORKING AMERICA, WHILE SOCKING IT TO THE TAXPAYERS AGAIN, LOOK ELSEWHERE. ###