

The First Congressional District Health Care Advisory Council is a group of doctors, nurses, patients and other health care professionals interested in promoting innovative solutions to the important issues and challenges currently facing our health care system. The Advisory Council meets regularly to engage in discussion and promote policy in this important issue area.

I believe America's health care system is in need of fundamental reform. We simply must make health care more affordable, enhance access for all Americans, ensure that patients are getting the care they need, and guarantee that doctors and patients, not insurance companies, are making important health care decisions.

I am committed to finding solutions that achieve health care reform consistent with these goals.

While I have legislative reform ideas that I think merit serious consideration, it is critically important that I hear from you. I want an open dialogue with the people of Virginia's 1st Congressional district, including doctors, nurses, patients, and other health care professionals who have a daily, up-close experience with the problems facing America's health care system. Working together, I know we can find innovative solutions that put us back on the right track.

The challenge before us is a difficult one. Today, approximately 46 million Americans (nearly 16% of the U.S. population) lack health insurance. Since 1999, health care insurance premiums have more than doubled for most Americans. Meanwhile, workers' wages have not kept pace.

Virginians are not immune to the nationwide trend in health care. For the last several years health care premiums in Virginia have increased at approximately ten percent a year. And, today, more than 1.1 million Virginians are uninsured. From the hourly worker in Newport News, Virginia, who must somehow find room in his or her budget to pay for health insurance to the small business owner in Fredericksburg, Virginia, who voluntarily chooses to provide health insurance as a benefit to his or her employees but with the slowing economy is finding it incredibly difficult to absorb increased health insurance costs, Virginians are struggling to find affordable health care.

Given the rising trend in health care costs and the struggling U.S. economy, the simple fact is that the number of uninsured will continue to increase unless we confront the issue now, head-on, and in a bipartisan fashion.

Below, please find a discussion draft of possible health care reforms. I present them to you in an effort to start a serious dialogue about finding solutions to a complex issue. I know we can improve the nation's health care system, reduce the number of uninsured individuals and families, and decrease the costs of health care.

Additionally, I am working to ensure that the following principles are included in the health care reform debate in Washington:

1. Make quality health care coverage affordable and accessible for every American, regardless of pre-existing health conditions.
2. Protect Americans from being forced into a new government-run health care plan that would: a) eliminate the health coverage that more than 100 million Americans currently receive through their job; b) limit choice of doctors and medical treatment options; and c) result in the federal government taking control of health care.
3. Let Americans who like their health care coverage keep it, and give all Americans the freedom to choose the health plan that best meets their needs.
4. Ensure that medical decisions are made by patients and their doctors, not government bureaucrats.
5. Improve Americans' lives through effective prevention, wellness, and disease management programs, while developing new treatments and cures for life-threatening diseases.
6. Bring fairness to the tax code by providing individuals with incentives to purchase health care coverage.
7. Enact medical liability reforms to expand patient access to care and reduce unnecessary defensive medicine.
8. Improve individuals' ability to buy innovative, portable and affordable health insurance products of their choice, including the sale of health care coverage across state lines.
9. Ensure that Americans have the information they need to make good decisions by requiring the timely public disclosure of health care price and quality information.

10. Develop new models to encourage individuals to plan for long term care needs.
11. Create public private partnerships to encourage research and product development for unmet medical needs and increase funding for medical research.
12. Crack down on waste, fraud and abuse.
13. Incentivize the use of Health Information Technology and protect patient privacy.

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