

Healthcare consumes nearly 1/5 of our economy each year and we owe it to the American people to get it right as we work to reform the system by fixing what is broken. The primary purpose of reform should be to reduce the cost of healthcare and health insurance so that both become more affordable. The last thing we need is more bureaucracy and costly government programs at the price of further debt upon an already overburdened budget. We must also assure that we do not change those parts of the system that are working or negatively affect folk's choice of care or insurance. This reform ought to have the support of a large portion of legislators from both sides of the aisle. Otherwise we are leaving out the thoughts and ideas of millions of Americans who don't believe this is the true way to fix an ailing system.

Throughout the process of crafting healthcare legislation I've worked hard to listen to folks from all over the district. I have formed a First District Healthcare Advisory Council, held town hall and telephone town hall meetings, and received thousands of emails, phone calls, and letters with an overwhelming message not to vote for a bill that included a government option as part of the fix for our healthcare system. With my vote, I brought the message from my constituents to Congress. However, that doesn't mean I or a great deal of folks at home are against reforming the healthcare system in our country.

While this bill has passed, there remain many more steps in the legislative process before it becomes law. I remain optimistic as the Senate works on their legislation and as Congress meets to craft a final bill that we will focus on other important aspects of reform to include: allowing the sale of insurance across state lines, meaningful tort reform, and creating affordable coverage that cannot be denied for those with preexisting conditions.

We owe it to ourselves and the American people to truly reform this process, not pass a controversial piece of legislation without bipartisan support and label it as reform. I look forward to continuing to gather your thoughts and ideas as we move towards a final vote on this legislation.

*Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations*

*Subcommittee.*