

On Sunday, the House of Representatives passed the Senate version of the healthcare reform bill by a vote of 219-212. Instead of this moment being a time for celebration of bipartisanship and reform, it's come to represent what folks deeply resent about Washington.

The months leading up to this day ignored the legislative process of holding hearings on the proposed healthcare reform, by writing this bill entirely behind closed doors. Thus leaving the American people out of the room where decisions are being made on an issue which affects each and every one of us. Employing this method has given us unsavory deals and shady transactions as opposed to an open and fair process that we should expect from our public servants.

Additionally, the cost of this legislation is truly troubling. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimates this bill will cost \$940 billion over the next ten years. We've learned that the bill includes \$569.2 billion in tax increases, \$463 billion in Medicare cuts, \$123 billion in diverted annual revenues from Social Security and long term care insurance and \$114 billion in unaccounted additional annual spending to operate the bill's required new programs.

The result is that federal spending will increase and funds from Social Security and long term care will be used to make up the difference. The federal deficit is already expected to exceed \$700 billion every year over the next decade, in the process doubling the national debt to over \$20 trillion. By 2020, the annual national debt is projected to be \$1.2 trillion, of which \$900 billion alone is interest on the prior debt. At a time when our deficits are ballooning, we can hardly afford this type of monumental spending.

Furthermore, the bill raises taxes on unearned income which includes: dividends, interest, passive business income and capital gains. Economists across the spectrum agree that raising taxes in a recession will have detrimental effects on any sort of recovery. Similarly, this legislation would also raise \$52 billion in new taxes on employers, hitting our small businesses while they continue to struggle in this economic climate. One small business owner told me this year, "Rob, the tax increases from this bill would wipe out my profit margin. I'll have to either: decrease employee hours, lay off people, or shut my doors." That's not the kind of choice we should be forcing on anyone, especially small businesses which account for 70% of the new jobs created each year.

Lastly, I was concerned about how this bill would affect our servicemembers and their families. The proposed legislation does not recognize all of the health care plans currently offered to servicemembers, veterans and their dependents as “acceptable coverage” or “minimum essential coverage” as required by the bill’s mandate that every individual have insurance coverage. The First District is home to tens of thousands veterans and their families, as well as a number of military installations. Those constituents will be at risk of having their insurance plans being deemed “unacceptable” and therefore have to purchase supplemental insurance or obtain a new plans altogether.

For those reasons I voted against the bill on the floor Sunday evening. That does not mean though that I’m against healthcare reform. We absolutely must have true reform that decreases costs, increases access and portability, and is put together through a transparent process. The American people expected more from their legislators, and unfortunately are going to be left with increased taxes and government control, instead of the reform they deserve.

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.