

Health Care Reform Is Coming

Senator Ron Wyden (D-Ore.)

There is good news ahead from Capitol Hill. Health care reform is on the horizon. President Obama has declared that this is the year to finally fix the nation's broken health care system. Leaders in both the House and Senate are determined to find solutions that offer every American health security. And for once, the needs of the consumer are front and center, dwarfing the once-mighty influence of deep-pocketed special interests.

I am personally determined to make sure that all Americans have real choices in order to access quality, affordable coverage, but reforming the system will take more than any piecemeal approaches that serve as window-dressing. Health care costs currently eat up 18% of our country's gross domestic product. Money many employers would otherwise pass along to their employees is instead used to pay for health care premiums. American employers are losing out in the global marketplace as they compete against companies that don't have to shoulder the cost of their employees' health care.

It's become increasingly clear that it will be impossible to fix the nation's economic problems without addressing the rising costs of health care and the burden it puts on businesses and individuals.

The only way to manage the ballooning costs of health care is to look at the big picture and find holistic solutions that address fundamental flaws in what is currently a "sick care" system instead of a health care system. To that end, certain principles are becoming the common ground that many in Congress can agree on.

Key among those principles is the belief that patient health begins by focusing on prevention and wellness. The new American health care system will find much-needed savings and improved health for patients by encouraging healthy behaviors that help avoid chronic diseases.

This health reform effort that I and others are leading is finally taking seriously the problem that so many of you face on a daily basis. Cardiologists frequently perform a heart procedure on a patient one day, only to have the patient go back to their old ways of eating fried

foods and ice cream the next. Congress is looking at building rewards into the new system that will steer Americans away from bad health habits and into programs that support healthier lifestyles. Eliminating copayments for prevention and wellness programs will help integrate sensible habits into Americans' lives.

Specialists will be incorporated into chronic care management services, connecting patients in need with the experts who know how to heal them. Primary care doctors will get rewarded for coordinating their patients' care, giving them a more comprehensive way to diagnose and treat health issues.

It is clear that to get the economy back on track, health care costs can no longer be left to spiral out of control. The new day that is dawning in American health care is one that will require patients to be more involved in their health care choices and in managing their own health. That's good news for patients and for the physicians who care for them. It's just what the doctor ordered for the nation's economic health as well. ■