

Jeff Smith on Healthcare

Over 44 million Americans are uninsured. We have more paper-pushing middlemen than doctors and nurses combined (3.6 million to 3.2 million). We spend twice as much on healthcare (as a percentage of our GDP) as other industrialized nations with universal coverage. And our healthcare costs are spiraling out of control, hurting working families and businesses alike. This system is broken and we will have to fix it eventually. Why not start now?

Imagine how horrible it must be to have no way of providing healthcare for your sick or injured child. Fearful of paying out-of-pocket for a doctor's visit, the uninsured (usually working class families that make too much money to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to private HMOs or PPOs) allow their ailments to worsen until expensive emergency room care is necessary. Then the exorbitant costs of trauma center care are paid by all of us through higher deductibles and higher premiums.

The social costs of the uninsured are also borne by the wider community, when one of our uninsured colleagues comes to work sick and infects us, or when one of our children's classmates comes to school sick and spreads the flu. There is no issue that more clearly highlights the fact that we are all in this together.

The central paradox of our health care system is that it is based on avoiding sick (i.e., unprofitable) patients. There are 3.6 million people in this country doing medical bill paperwork, and 3.2 million doctors and nurses. It doesn't make any sense to have more middlemen than practitioners. The last thing we should be doing is spend such a large percentage of our scarce health care dollar on middlemen when there are 44 million people without insurance and millions more who are underinsured.

After speaking with dozens of doctors, nurses, businessmen, lawyers, and patients, I have come to the conclusion that a system of universal health insurance will be the only way to both control mushrooming health care costs and cover the millions of uninsured people who currently use the emergency room as a primary care physician.

Our healthcare problem will not be wished away. In coming decades, as baby boomers retire, our healthcare situation will only get worse. We need to be proactive in facing this problem. As a Congressman, I will fight to insure every American through a system that (by cutting out profit-driven middlemen) is less expensive, more efficient, and more just. I look forward to the day when we live in an America where not only do accused criminals have the right to an attorney, sick children have the right to quality healthcare.

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