

## MEMBERS OF CONGRESS CALL FOR BIPARTISAN HEALTH CARE REFORM

Thursday, June 18

Democrats and republicans must work together to achieve health care reform

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WASHINGTON--A group of Members of Congress—two Democrats and two Republicans—today emphasized the need for health care reform to be bipartisan. On the day after three former Senate majority leaders released their bipartisan health care reform proposal, Reps. Jim Cooper (D-TN), Mike Castle (R-DE), Parker Griffith (D-AL) and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) called for similar bipartisanship in the House and Senate.

"Health care reform should be our top priority, period," said Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN). "But the Senate's restrictive reconciliation process will make real reform impossible. That's why Democrats and Republicans must work together to pass a bill that meets President Obama's goals, lowering cost, raising quality and covering all Americans. Yesterday Tom Daschle, Bob Dole and Howard Baker showed it can be done. Today a bipartisan group of members of Congress said we're ready and willing to make it happen."

"Real reform in Congress is best done when we work together," said Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE). "Improving health care is indisputably one of the most important things we can do to make a difference in the lives of Americans, but we must begin the conversation with cost in mind, not as an afterthought. Costs should be lower and quality must be higher."

"For health care reform to be the success that Americans want and deserve, we need a plan with bipartisan support. Our goal is to create a plan that is uniquely American, and this requires input and compromise from all sides," said Rep. Parker Griffith (D-AL). "Successful health care reform will make our nation and our people stronger and healthier—both physically and economically. The decisions made this summer will affect everyone, and Americans are counting on the leaders in Washington to work together and make wise decisions as health care reform comes before the House and the Senate."

"Health care cost and access are issues for Americans regardless of their political beliefs, and members of Congress ought to be working across the aisle to solve these problems," said Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO). "Clearly, the one-party solutions on the table are even more expensive than anyone anticipated, and it will take responsible ideas from both members of both parties in order to bring cost and access into balance. I'm excited and proud to be a member of this open-minded group of members who are taking both the cost and the access issues seriously in the quest for workable, affordable health care reform proposals."

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Health Care Reform and Bipartisanship

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Rep. Jim Cooper

6/18/09

Hi, I'm Jim Cooper. I'm a Democrat and I represent Nashville, Tennessee.

Right off the bat, I want to be clear: I support health care reform, as does everyone on this stage. I share all of the goals laid out by the President in his June 2 letter. I believe that every American should have high-quality, affordable health care. And I believe that reforming health care should be Congress's top priority.

Let me repeat that: health care reform should be Congress's top priority. We are not here to slow it down. That's the Senate's job. So don't believe the phony talking points that are being circulated that we're trying to "slow down the process." The process is already creaking under its own weight and we haven't even seen full bill text yet. Don't take my word for it; just read your own publications.

On the contrary, we are trying to ensure that reform actually happens. We are here because we see health care reform bogging down in the Senate, and we worry that the chance to achieve this great victory for the American people is slipping out of reach.

Here's why what's happening in the Senate worries me so much. If reform gets bogged down, it will have to go through the Senate's reconciliation process. This is not good news for supporters of health care reform. In fact, it's awful news.

Reconciliation is just what the trillion dollars of vested interests who want to kill health care reform are hoping for. That's because they know something that few people in Washington have figured out: the Senate's very restrictive reconciliation rules will prevent a true health care reform bill from passing.

Has anyone here actually looked at the reconciliation process and the Byrd rule? Every committee would have to report a bill that reduced the deficit by \$1 billion in five years. It would have to be deficit-neutral each year after that. It couldn't include "extraneous" material—like all the vitally important changes to our health care delivery system. Or, if we couldn't find the savings, our grand health care reform achievement would have to sunset.

In short, health care reform under reconciliation wouldn't be health care reform at all. It would be a deficit reduction bill relating to health care. Or a reform package with an expiration date.

And hey, you know me, I think deficit reduction is great. But this is about passing a robust health care reform bill. One that provides every American with low-cost, high-quality health insurance. One that focuses on prevention. One that keeps people healthy. One that gives them choices. One that modernizes our delivery system. And one that lowers cost. After all, the out-of-control cost of health care is bankrupting the American people.

Something major happened yesterday. Democrats and Republicans, working together, unveiled a bipartisan comprehensive health care reform plan. Tom Daschle, Bob Dole and Howard Baker did what Congress is failing to do. They met all of President Obama's goals, and they fully financed their proposal.

And the White House released a statement praising this bipartisan leadership. In the House of Representatives, meanwhile, we are explicitly told not to work with Republicans.

Now, my personal belief is that Congress could begin marking up the bipartisan Wyden-Bennett Healthy Americans Act right away. Smart commentators like Jonathan Cohn at The New Republic and Ezra Klein at the Washington Post have praised this bill. It's progressive, it's bipartisan and it's deficit-neutral.

But on that point, I don't speak for everyone up here. All I know is that health care reform is on life support because the Senate can't figure out how to pay for it. Jon Cohn and Ezra Klein are worried. I'm worried. And I'm speaking out today because I've been through a failed health care reform process before. We can't afford to repeat those mistakes this year. Let's follow President Obama's lead and work together to finally provide health care to every American. And let's do it right now.

I'd now like to turn it over to Mike Castle, my good friend and— I might add—a fellow cosponsor of the Healthy Americans Act. Thanks.

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