

Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA)

Prepared Remarks

Citizens Health Care Working Group

Saturday, February 25, 2006

Seattle Center, NW Rooms,

Snoqualmie Room (305 Harrison St)

Good morning,

Does anyone here doubt that America faces a national health care crisis? It's your job to develop and submit recommendations to Congress. I hope you start with a giant wake-up call.

I'm a medical doctor. Universal health care was my top priority when I first went to Congress in 1989. It still is.

Too often, a discussion about providing affordable health care in America revolves around what we have to lose.

I believe the real issue is what we have to gain by covering every American with a national health insurance program.

Ten years ago, we spent \$900 billion on health care in America; today it is nearly twice that amount.

46 million Americans have no health care coverage at all.

And, we have no way of knowing how many Americans are under-insured or barely hanging on to the coverage they have.

Recently, the President offered his ideas about health care reform.

Let me sum them up this way.

(Show Band-Aids)

I'm not being disrespectful. I'm being candid- and realistic.

The centerpiece of the President's plan is a Health Savings Account. You purchase a high deductible catastrophic policy, then save and pay for everything else on your own.

Health care is a national crisis, but the President wants to make it an individual crisis.

Only we can solve the national health care crisis in America.

Does anyone here think they could set aside a hundred bucks a month and call that safe and adequate car insurance?

That's the basic idea behind the President's HSA plan.

It's another attempt to cut the social safety net underneath the middle class.

HSA is GIA- Go It Alone.

For America's uninsured, many don't earn enough to derive much benefit from a tax-free plan.

As for America's middle class, HSAs are a false promise.

A bedrock principle of America is to pool our resources and share the risk, because it benefits us all.

That's why we collectively support police, fire, national defense and a host of other essential services.

The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution pledges that the federal government will promote the general welfare.

I believe that includes universal health care and it's long overdue.

The only way America can solve our health care crisis is through universal health care coverage.

I've introduced HR 1200 to do just that.

My bill begins with a fundamental premise of our Democracy: "We the People..."

HR 1200 pools our resources to provide universal coverage for all Americans.

HR 1200 is a federal guarantee with programs and decisions made locally, closest to the patient, as they should be.

One nation, one solution, with the States in charge.

If serving the public good with good public policy isn't enough to drive universal health care, let me give you another reason, perhaps the most compelling of all.

Scientists have charted a new frontier: The Human Genome Project. Discovering the blueprint of our genetic code has brought us to the dawn of a new day when a single drop of blood can reveal the diseases you are likely to suffer in your lifetime.

A health insurer, using genetic information, could decide to only insure you against the things you are unlikely to get, and withhold coverage for all the things that are likely to affect you.

What happens when we know?

Will pre-existing conditions denying a lifetime of coverage occur at birth?

The day is coming when health insurance as we know it will become obsolete.

A system of health insurance based on statistical probability will not function in a world based on medical certainty.

Universal health care coverage- one pool – one nation – is the only cost effective option available in a world where a drop of blood will foretell your medical future.

Beyond dollars, universal health care coverage is the only moral imperative in a society where science will offer a lifetime diagnosis--- at birth.

As a medical doctor I know that listening to the patient is key to curing the patient.

If we listen to America, we can cure America's health care crisis.

The prescription is we, not me.

The longer we postpone treatment, the worse it will be for the American people.

There's no reason to wait and no time to wait.

Send an urgent message to Congress.

Solve the problem- now.

Thank you.