



Story available at <http://www.billingsgazette.net/articles/2006/04/19/opinion/gazette/48-guestopinion3.txt>

Published on Wednesday, April 19, 2006.
Last modified on 4/19/2006 at 12:08 am

Guest Opinion: Speak up Friday in national health care, coverage forum

By **MAX BAUCUS**
U.S. Senator

I once heard a quote that said: "Life is full of worry. Anyone who tells you different is selling something." We all have worries and concerns. Whether it is health, finances, family or safety, there are many things out there to cause us worry. One issue that has many of us in Montana concerned is health care. On Friday, I am going to host a meeting in Billings with folks from all over the state to try to figure out how we can ease this concern.

America has the greatest doctors, nurses and hospitals in the world, but unfortunately a lot of our neighbors are left looking through the window. Nearly one-fifth of all Montanans don't have health insurance. That means more people are uninsured across our great state than live in Yellowstone County.

Many hard-working people have seen their company health insurance disappear. Meanwhile, many small-business owners are feeling the burden of trying to provide health care and still stay afloat. On average, Americans pay twice as much for health care as people in other countries; unfortunately, this doesn't mean we are twice as healthy.

Yet it isn't just those who are uninsured who feel the pain of these high costs; it will affect every one of us at some point. Whether it is our favorite neighborhood cafe closing because it couldn't afford employee benefits, or someone in our church holding a bake sale to pay for medical bills, this problem touches us all.

Our system has to be changed. The health care system needs to provide more coverage and better care to all Montanans -- to all Americans.

However, there are only so many slices to the pie, so we will have to make some tough decisions and trade-offs. Yet these tough calls shouldn't be made until we hear directly from people all across Montana. As the old saying goes, the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

To get this valuable information, I helped create the Citizens' Health Care Working Group as part of the major Medicare prescription drug program Congress passed in 2003. This group is vital to figuring out what works because it listens to people who have their boots on the ground. The group will travel around the country, and ask folks four key questions:

- What health care benefits and services should be provided in this country?
- How do you want health care delivered?

- How should health care coverage be financed?
- What trade-offs are you willing to make in either benefits or financing to ensure affordable, high-quality health care and services?

There will only be a few of these sessions across the nation, but I made sure that one stop would be in Big Sky Country. From 8 a.m. till noon Friday at MetraPark, Yellowstone County Commissioner Bill Kennedy and I will host the session and talk with folks from all over the state. I encourage everyone to join us because we need to put our heads together to figure out what can be done. Comments collected at these meetings will be presented directly to President Bush.

By working together, we can help influence the health care debate in Washington and provide quality, affordable health care to all Montanans -- no matter where they live.

Copyright © The Billings Gazette, a division of [Lee Enterprises](#).