

Bipartisan blueprint for health reform: ten Senate leaders say, "let's fix health care now"

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

In a strong message to President George W. Bush, 10 senators - five from each party - on Tuesday sent a straightforward letter to the President inviting him to work with them to fix the nation's health care system. The Senators, from different parts of the country and different parts of the political spectrum, have one thing in common: each of them believes that the status quo on health care is unacceptable. Further delay is intolerable as costs continue to skyrocket, our population ages, and chronic illness increases. In addition, businesses are at a severe disadvantage when their competitors in the global market get health care for free.

The letter was signed by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jim DeMint (R-SC), Kent Conrad (D-ND), Robert Bennett (R-UT), Ken Salazar (D-CO), Trent Lott (R-MS), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Mike Crapo (R-ID), Herb Kohl (D-WI) and John Thune (R-SD).

The text of the letter follows:

February 13, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As U.S. Senators of both political parties we would like to work with you and your Administration to fix the American health care system.

Each of us believes our current health system needs to be fixed now. Further delay is unacceptable as costs continue to skyrocket, our population ages, and chronic illness increases. In addition, our businesses are at a severe disadvantage when their competitors in the global market get health care for free.

We would like to work with you and your Administration to pass legislation in this Congress that would:

- 1) Ensure that all Americans would have affordable, quality, private health coverage, while protecting current government programs. We believe the health care system cannot be fixed without providing solutions for

everyone. Otherwise, the costs of those without insurance will continue to be shifted to those who do have coverage.

2) Modernize Federal tax rules for health coverage. Democratic and Republican economists have convinced us that the current rules disproportionately favor the most affluent, while promoting inefficiency.

3) Create more opportunities and incentives for states to design health solutions for their citizens. Many state officials are working in their state legislatures to develop fresh, creative strategies for improving health care, and we believe any legislation passed in this Congress should not stymie that innovation.

4) Take steps to create a culture of wellness through prevention strategies, rather than perpetuating our current emphasis on sick care. For example, Medicare Part A pays thousands of dollars in hospital expenses, while Medicare Part B provides no incentives for seniors to reduce blood pressure or cholesterol. Employers, families, and all our constituents want emphasis on prevention and wellness.

5) Encourage more cost-effective chronic and compassionate end-of-life care. Studies show that an increase in health care spending does not always mean an increase in quality of outcomes. All Americans should be empowered to make decisions about their end of life care, not be forced into hospice care without other options. We hope to work with you on policies that address these issues.

6) Improve access to information on price and quality of health services. Today, consumers have better access to information about the price and quality of washing machines than on the price and quality of health services.

We disagree with those who say the Senate is too divided and too polarized to pass comprehensive health care legislation. We disagree with those who believe that this issue should not come up until after the next presidential election. We disagree with those who want to wait when the American people are saying, loud and clear, “We want to fix health care now.”

We look forward to working with you in a bipartisan manner in the days ahead.