



Senator Enzi's thoughts on 10 Steps to Transform Health Care in America

As I listen to the presidential candidates on the campaign trail, I am encouraged by what I hear them say about healthcare.

All of the major candidates seem to recognize that the healthcare system in this country needs serious work, and most — even on the Democratic side — seem to realize that a Washington-run national healthcare system is not the answer.

Doctors and patients, not bureaucrats, must maintain control of individuals' healthcare.

With healthcare costs skyrocketing and the number of uninsured Americans climbing higher and higher, it is no surprise that, in poll after poll, voters cite healthcare as one of their top concerns going into the 2008 elections. It should not be this way. Healthcare should not be the big issue in the 2008 elections because we should do something big about it now. There is no good reason to wait.

I have introduced a bill, Ten Steps to Transform Health Care in America, that would go a long way in making sure every American has a health insurance card in his or her wallet.

While I do not have space in this forum to go into detail about each of the 10 steps, I would encourage everyone to go my website (enzi.senate.gov) and check out my plan.

We could enact any one of these sensible proposals today and produce results tomorrow.

We could take healthcare out of the debate by cutting out the rhetoric and taking action now — not after the election — to ensure that every American has access to the healthcare they need. I think most Americans would agree with me.

They don't want to wait for an election to see some changes. They certainly don't want to wait another year to stop their healthcare costs from going up and up and up. They want to see change and they want to see change now. Our small business owners, our working families, and our millions of uninsured cannot afford to wait.

Candidates from both parties are proposing alternatives to ensure that more Americans can get better healthcare, and I like many of these ideas. In fact, I recognize many of them from my comprehensive Ten Steps bill.

Candidates are talking about reforming a flawed tax code so that individuals who do not receive health insurance through their employer can purchase it in the private market without being penalized by the IRS. They are talking about standard tax deductions and tax subsidies. These tax-based reforms are central to my plan to help all Americans gain access to affordable health insurance.

As a former small business owner, I am very happy to hear candidates address the fact that small businesses have been hit hardest by the rising cost of health insurance. I would encourage them to take a look at my plan to allow small business owners and working Americans the flexibility to pool their members across state lines and use their combined purchasing power to negotiate the affordable plans they need.

Candidates are also talking about things we can do now to reduce the costs of healthcare, like endorsing hassle-free electronic medical records and supporting medical malpractice reform, which my Ten Steps bill would do.

Of course, the most critical step we must take to reduce medical costs across the board is to move our system from one that provides sick care to one that provides healthcare. As Ben Franklin said, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We need an innovative system that will do more to help Americans prevent and manage chronic illness, so that they can live healthy lives with fewer medical costs. My plan would put us on track to do that.

These are all sensible, patient-centered proposals that we should have enacted long ago. I am disappointed this body did not make progress on any of these issues that impact every American last year.

However, with healthcare clearly at the top of so many peoples' minds, I am hopeful that this year we can move from talking about problems with our healthcare system to solving these problems. We can't wait until after the election, because the American people deserve more than politics. They deserve action.

Enzi is ranking member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.