

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

Government-Run Health Care on the Horizon

The over-reaching direction our government has taken, especially since the first of the year, is truly mind-boggling. Like a growing number of people throughout southwest Alabama, I am becoming extremely anxious with the direction our country is going.

While health care reform is a top priority for most Americans, most of us would strongly object to changing our health care or health insurance in a way that gives us less control over the choices we are allowed to make, takes away our right to choose our own doctors and gives even more control to the federal government.

Yet just last week, the House Democratic majority released 1,017 pages of legislative language – under the banner of health care reform – calling for yet another massive expansion of government and a host of tax increases to fund it.

In just about two weeks time, the president and the House Democratic majority expect Congress to debate and pass a bill that amounts to a government takeover of 17 percent of the nation's economy.

As I begin to review this massive and complex piece of legislation, I am extremely disappointed – but not surprised – that some of the core principles laid out by House Republicans which would lower costs, improve access, and protect health care choices for all Americans were totally ignored in the development of the House's health care reform bill.

Bureaucrats, not doctors, would decide which treatments, procedures, and prescriptions are appropriate for patients.

Congressional Budget Office (CBO) Director Douglas Elmendorf confirmed to the Senate Budget Committee last week that this proposed government takeover of health care will drive health care costs even higher.

He stated, "The coverage proposals in this legislation would expand federal spending on health care to a significant degree. And in our analysis so far, we don't see other provisions in this legislation reducing federal health spending by a corresponding degree."

Small business groups are equally appalled at this massive takeover of our health care system.

The National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) is opposed to the Democrats' bill, "Because it threatens the viability of our nation's job creators, fails to increase access and choice to all small businesses, destroys choice and competition for private insurance and fails to address the core challenge facing small businesses – cost."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce also sent a letter to Congress expressing opposition, stating, "it threatens the viability of our nation's job creators, fails to increase access and choice to all small businesses, destroys choice and competition for private insurance and fails to address the core challenge facing small businesses – cost."

They say the devil is in the details, and 1017 pages is a lot of room for details. I don't believe the people of south Alabama will support a \$1.5 trillion government takeover of health care and new small business tax – I won't either.

Alabama's Own Nominated for U.S. Surgeon General

At a press conference in the White House Rose Garden, President Barack Obama last week nominated Alabama's own, Dr. Regina Benjamin, to be the next United States Surgeon General.

A lifelong resident of Alabama, Dr. Benjamin has dedicated herself to serving the underserved. She is the founder and chief executive of the Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic.

When Bayou La Batre was devastated by Hurricane Georges in 1998 and again in 2005 by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, she rode from house to house in a pickup truck, caring for her patients one by one until her clinic could be rebuilt.

Just last year, she was selected for a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant." In 1998 she was awarded the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights.

She was also named by Time Magazine as one of the "Nation's 50 Future Leaders Age 40 and Under," and she has been featured in the New York Times, ABC's World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, CBS This Morning, and People Magazine.

When confirmed by the Senate, Dr. Benjamin will become the third surgeon general from the state of Alabama.

Dr. Luther Terry from Red Level was surgeon general from 1961 to 1965, and Dr. David Satcher from Anniston served in the post from 1998 to 2001.

Dr. Benjamin is a superb choice to be our nation's next surgeon general, and I couldn't be more proud that one of south Alabama's own has been tapped to be 'America's doctor.'

There are few physicians who have earned more respect and admiration from her peers – as well as the lasting gratitude from her community and state – than Regina Benjamin. She sees a challenge – and she's seen many in her years of practicing medicine in south Mobile County – as an opportunity waiting to be explored.

The president did himself – and his administration – proud, and I predict America is going to become a big fan of Dr. Benjamin, just as those of us are who know her.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

For release the week of Monday, July 20, 2009. For more information please contact Mike Lewis at (202)225-4931.