Office of Representative Heath Shuler

Rep. Shuler to Host Tele-town Hall Meetings to Listen and Talk about Health-care Reform

"Health-care reform has become the hot topic both in the district and around the nation. That's why I plan on holding two tele-town hall meetings within next four weeks to listen to comments, questions and concerns from Western North Carolina constituents about the health-care reform bill that will come up for vote on the House floor after Labor Day. This is a way to reach thousands of constituents, who can call in from the convenience of their own homes.

I continue to oppose the health-care bill passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee on July 31, despite a few changes made to the legislation. However, I'm pleased that the Blue Dogs were able to make some modest improvements in late July. Many in Washington wanted to rush this bill Congress. However, I believe it's important that we take a close examination of this complex bill because it will have a large impact on American families and businesses.

The current House bill will require all Americans to obtain health insurance, whether from their employers or by purchasing it from providers. The bill offers credits for low-income people, and the federal government would create a public-option insurance plan that would compete with private insurers.

My big concern is that it doesn't do enough to wring out waste, fraud and other excessive costs from our current health-care system. Households, businesses and the government continue to see their health-care costs rise at a time when the economy is struggling. Health-insurance premiums have more than doubled over the past decade, far surpassing workers' wage gains during this time. If we want to reform the health-care system to contain costs, why are we trying to add millions more Americans to a broken system that will cost the federal government another $1 trillion?

Additionally, the bill provides few incentives to promote wellness, disease management, and prevention, and should go much further. The Asheville Project is a wonderful example of how wellness and prevention can save everyone money. Working with city

employees suffering from diabetes, the Asheville Project offered them incentives to improve their blood-sugar monitoring and better manage key aspects of their diabetes. As a result, each patient saved at least $400 in waived co-pays to see doctors, the employer saved more than $900 per participant in health-care costs and absenteeism was cut in half.

The House bill also mandates that all businesses with payrolls above $500,000 annually would have to provide health insurance benefits to their employees or pay penalties. That means owners of small restaurants, stores or construction companies could face additional costs at a time when they are struggling to meet payrolls. The last thing I want to see is more costs put on the backs of our small businesses.

I have met with local doctors, hospitals and constituents in the past two months to discuss health-care reform in addition to discussions with national health-care organizations. But I want to continue to listen. That's why I am holding these tele-town conferences as a way to reach thousands of constituents stretched throughout Western North Carolina and give people a chance to pose questions and comments about the issue. The first one will be held on Aug. 13 at 7:10 p.m. To participate, area residents can call my office for a toll-free number they can use to access the town tele-conference.

Health-care reform is one of the biggest issues this Congress will tackle and will affect all Americans. Congress needs to craft a bill that will work for American families and businesses to provide them relief from health-care costs that continue to mount. It's more critical to get it done right rather than getting it done right now. "

Rep. Heath Shuler

New Yorker article on health care

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