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But Dem plan unaffordable

BY LEONARD LANCE

Right now, there is great debate in Congress about how we go about dramatically reforming health care in this country.

Most congressional Democrats and Republicans agree: Health care costs have been skyrocketing for far too long, overwhelming

The measure is a \$1.5 trillion government takeover of health care that will lead to fewer jobs, higher taxes and less health coverage for New Jerseyans.

Under the plan, the federal government would be responsible for ensuring that all people, regardless of income or the state of their health, have access to an affordable insurance plan. Individuals and employers would be mandated to get health coverage or face hefty penalties.

To help pay for this mandate in coverage, the Democrats' plan calls for raising taxes on many New Jersey individuals, families and small businesses to levels not seen since the 1980s.

It is no wonder that a broad coalition of job-creating groups representing chambers of commerce, small businesses, home builders and manufacturers have come out strongly against the proposed health care bill.

This type of mandated "public option" is nothing more than Washington-speak for a government-run health care where the federal government stands between doctors and patients and important life-saving treatments for patients are denied based solely on cost.

Most concerning to me is the fact that the Democrats' health care bill would increase, not reduce, our nation's burgeoning long-term health costs.

According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO), instead of saving the federal government from fiscal catastrophe, the Democrats' health care proposal would worsen an already bleak budget outlook, increasing deficit projections and driving the nation more deeply into debt. The CBO is the official arbiter of the costs of legislation in Congress.

There is a better way.

Earlier this summer, I joined members of the Republican centrist "Tuesday Group" in the House of Representatives in offering a proposal to reduce health care costs, protect and expand access to care and increase the quality of care in a way Americans can afford — without new taxes, costly mandates or a government takeover of health care.

The centrist alternative is a better way toward real reform without raising taxes on New Jersey's working families, adding to the federal debt or jeopardiz-

ing employer-provided health coverage.

The bill, known as the "Medical Rights and Reform Act," would mandate a fundamental principle — the government should not come between patients and their doctors.

This act would protect all Americans' relationship with their doctors, the integrity of the medical profession and the right of Americans to choose the care they deem appropriate without federal delay or restriction.

To lower health care costs, the act would foster state innovation through insurance market reforms, high-risk pools, community health networks and new association options for small businesses.

The bill also includes: lawsuit reforms to end the practice of defensive medicine and ensure fair compensation for injured patients; acceleration of health information technology programs to improve the quality of care and reduce errors; strong standards and processes to target waste, fraud and abuse; targeted prevention and wellness programs to address costly chronic diseases and promote healthy living; and greater tax incentives for individuals and small businesses to buy health insurance.

Our alternative plan expands access to Americans without health insurance by providing greater incentives to small businesses to cover their employees; encouraging state-centered insurance market reforms; giving low-income families the option to use public funds to purchase private health insurance plans; enhancing Health Savings Accounts; allowing young adults to remain dependents on their parents' plans; and expanding rural health care programs.

I believe health care reform is too important to get wrong, and Americans deserve better solutions than those coming out of Washington.

Democrats should put aside their \$1.5 trillion health care tax hike plan and take a hard look at the affordable and effective Medical Rights and Reform Act.

Together we can find real solutions to make health care more affordable in a fiscally responsible way.

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the middle class and businesses during these difficult economic times.

For my part, I have been traveling throughout New Jersey's 7th Congressional District meeting with doctors, hospitals, senior citizens, small businesses and working families alike as part of a health care listening session.

The feedback has been almost universally the same: We need real health care reform to reduce costs for families and small businesses in need while expanding access and increasing the quality of care in a way we can afford.

That's why I was so disappointed when last week the Democratic Leadership released its health care reform plan.