

Positives in the Senate Healthcare Bill

Jonathan Cohn commented: The most important thing is that this bill will finally put it on the record that Healthcare is a right, not a privilege.

(Al Franken speech):

... most health care premiums will continue to go up – it’s just that they will go up at a slower rate than they would if this bill weren’t adopted.

First, what does this bill do about health care costing so much?

- Let’s take a look at a point that Dr. Atul Gawande, a Harvard physician, makes. He points out that almost half of this bill comprises programs to try out different ways to lower costs and improve quality. But these projects and pilots will generate solutions to fix the biggest problems in health care —like paying doctors fee-for-service, which rewards volume and not value. For example, thanks to the efforts of Maria Cantwell and my colleague Amy Klobuchar and others, for the first time ever, **we will include what’s called the “value index” in the Medicare payment structure. Doctors who provide high quality care at a reasonable cost will no longer be punished. Instead, they will be rewarded for being effective partners in their patients’ care.**
- **The bill also calls for all health insurance companies to use a single uniform standard for claims,** just like we do now in Minnesota and which will save our state \$60 million this year.
- One program in the bill is the Diabetes Prevention Program at CDC. I worked on these provisions with my Republican colleague, Dick Lugar from Indiana, who’s a real hero of mine. **The Diabetes Prevention Program is based on what we’ve learned in Minnesota and Indiana— pre-diabetics can avoid becoming diabetic if they get access to community services like nutrition counseling and gym memberships. These are proven to cut the risk of developing diabetes in half so people can live healthier lives, and their health care costs less.** We’ll replicate this program across the country.
- **We’ll also guarantee that routine checkups and recommended preventive care like colonoscopies and mammograms are covered by all insurance plans at no cost. No copays for preventive care.**
- **I’m also happy that the bill requires a minimum medical loss ratio, something I’ve been fighting for with Senator Rockefeller. This is going to make health insurance companies put at least 85 percent of premiums toward actual health services, not administrative costs, marketing campaigns or profits or bloated CEO salaries.** Advocates have been trying to get these profit restrictions in place in many states, but it’s usually too hard to fight these companies at the local level. So while I’m really disappointed that we don’t have the public option, the minimum medical loss ratio is a potent measure that will limit insurers’ profits and put the brakes on skyrocketing premiums.

What if I get sick or lose my job? What will I do?

- **This bill reforms insurance markets, guaranteeing that having health insurance equals security. Some of these reforms will kick in when the bill passes; others will kick in four years from now.**
- **Six months after this bill is passed, we’ll get rid of all pre-existing condition exclusions for kids, and young adults will be able to stay on their parents’ insurance until they turn 27.**
- **Within 90 days, families who get turned down because of pre-existing conditions will have access to non-profit insurance coverage designed to cover people who can’t buy insurance on their own.** These are called high-risk pools... this bill will invest \$5 billion to help people afford the premiums in the high-risk pools
- **Then in 2014, anybody who doesn’t have an affordable plan through work, or has been denied coverage, will be able to go to a website and purchase coverage through a new insurance marketplace, called the**

exchange. No one will be turned away or charged more because of their health status, or because they happen to be women. It will let you compare plans and prices. What you pay will be based on your income. No one will pay more than 10.2 percent of their income toward premiums in the Exchange. Lower-income families will pay significantly less. And if the coverage you're offered through your employer costs you more than 8 percent of your income, you can go to the exchange.

- There are also many people who have insurance who are worried about losing what they have -- like those work for small businesses that are squeezed by growing health care costs. **Beginning in 2010, this bill will give small businesses tax credits to pay for up to 35 percent of their employees' premiums.**
- More small businesses will be able to cover more employees, more affordably. **And then in 2014, once the exchanges are up and running, small businesses can choose to go into the exchange so they can pool their risk with other small businesses.**

Will I go bankrupt from health care costs?

- (People) have maxed out their health insurance, or are getting uncomfortably close to their annual or lifetime limits. These arbitrary limits let insurance companies off the hook and leave you holding the bill when you're sick and need help the most. Fifty percent of personal bankruptcies in this country are due to a health crisis. 80 percent of those health care bankruptcies are people who have health insurance. **The good news is that within six months of passing this bill, new plans will not have lifetime limits on benefits and we'll stop companies from imposing annual limits on needed care.**
- **When the Exchanges are operational, the use of annual limits will be banned *entirely*.** When this bill is fully implemented it will give Americans access to affordable health care so they can avoid going bankrupt when they get really sick. That's really good.
- **We'll start closing the Medicare prescription drug donut hole in 2010; we'll invest in home visits for new mothers; more loan forgiveness for primary care providers and for doctors to practice rural areas; the Public Health Investment Fund; stronger anti-fraud laws; support for people with disabilities to stay out of nursing homes; and funding for community health centers.**