

## How We Can Achieve Bipartisan Health Reform

Advertisement

» Your Ad Here

By Ron Wyden and Robert F. Bennett  
Wednesday, August 5, 2009

We refuse to let partisanship kill health reform -- and we are proof that it doesn't have to.

As 12 U.S. senators from both sides of the aisle who have widely varying philosophies, we offer a concrete demonstration that it is possible to find common ground and pass real health reform this year. The process has been rocky, and slower than many had hoped. But the reports of the death of bipartisan health reform have been greatly exaggerated. Now is the time to resuscitate it, before the best opportunity in years is wasted.

Democratic activists have long campaigned for universal coverage and quality benefits. Republican activists zero in on empowering individuals and bringing market forces to the health-care system. Our approach does both. In our discussions on the Healthy Americans Act, each side gave a bit on some of its visions of perfect health reform to achieve bipartisanship.

The Democrats among us accepted an end to the tax-free treatment of employer-sponsored health insurance; instead, everyone -- not just those who currently get insurance through their employer -- would get a generous standard deduction that they would use to buy insurance -- and keep the excess if they buy a less expensive policy.

The Republicans agreed to require all individuals to have coverage and to provide subsidies where necessary to ensure that everyone can afford it. Most have agreed to require employers to contribute to the system and to pay workers wages equal to the amount the employer now contributes for health care. The Congressional Budget Office has reported that this framework is the only one thus far that bends the health-care cost curve down and makes it possible for the new system to pay for itself. It does this by creating a competitive market for health insurance in which individuals are empowered to choose the best values for their money and by cutting administrative costs and spreading risk across large groups of Americans.

First, we allow all Americans to have the same kind of choices available to us as members of Congress. Today, more than half of American workers who are lucky enough to have employer-provided insurance have no choice of coverage. Members of Congress who enroll their families in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program often have more than 10 options. This means that if members of Congress aren't happy with their family's insurance plan in 2009 or insurers raise their rates, they can pick a better plan in 2010. Our plan would give the consumer the same leverage in the health-care marketplace by creating state-run

insurance exchanges through which they can select plans, including their existing employer-sponsored plan.

Beyond giving Americans choices, our approach also ensures that all Americans will be able to keep that choice. We believe that at a time when millions of Americans are losing their jobs, members of Congress must be able to promise their constituents that "when you leave your job or your job leaves you, you can take your health care with you." Our approach ensures seamless portability.

Our point is not that our framework is the only way to reform the system or to reach consensus. But our effort has shown that it is possible to put politics aside and reach agreement on reforms that would improve the lives of all Americans. Insisting on any particular fix is the enemy of good legislating. A package that will entirely please neither side, but on which both can agree, stands not only the strongest chance of passage but also the best chance of gaining acceptance from the American people.

We didn't undertake this effort because we thought it would be easy; in fact, we started working together because we knew it would be hard. Passing health reform is going to require that we take a stand against the status quo and be willing to challenge every interest group that is jealously guarding the advantages it has under the current system, because health reform isn't about protecting the current system or preserving the advantages of a few. We can't forget that we are working on life-and-death issues facing our constituents, our families, our friends and our neighbors.

It's time to stop trying to figure out what pollsters say the country wants to hear from us and focus on what the country needs from us. The American people can't afford for Congress to fail again.

*Ron Wyden is a Democratic senator from Oregon. Robert F. Bennett is a Republican senator from Utah. The other authors of this op-ed, and co-sponsors of the Healthy Americans Act, are Sens. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), Ted Kaufman (D-Del.), Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), Mary Landrieu (D-La.), Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), Michael D. Crapo (R-Idaho), Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) and Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.).*

[Post a Comment](#)

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

Comments that include profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material will be removed from the site. Additionally, entries that are unsigned or contain "signatures" by someone other than the actual author will be removed. Finally, we will take steps to block users who violate any of our posting standards, terms of use or privacy policies or any other policies governing this site. Please review the [full rules](#) governing commentaries and discussions. You are fully responsible for the content that you post.

© 2009 The Washington Post Company

**Ads by Google**

[Plans for Small Business](#)

Find out why so many small businesses choose UnitedHealthcare®  
[UHC Today.com/Business](#)

[Health Insurance Quotes](#)

Compare Health Insurance Plans Request Quotes Online And Save Now  
[www.Insureco.org](#)

[Medicare Health Plans](#)

Free List of all Medicare Plans & Services. Compare Here and Save!  
[www.PlanPrescriber.com](#)