



Posted on Tue, Feb. 05, 2008

## REP. NILE DILLMORE: HEALTH REFORMS WORTHY

BY REP. NILE DILLMORE

When the Kansas Health Policy Authority released its reform recommendations, I was among the many who expressed disappointment that the authority did not go far enough. I have since come to the conclusion that these 21 recommendations were well-considered and are worthy of support.

Our long-term vision should be to create a healthier Kansas, and reducing the number of uninsured certainly is desirable. We should be striving for reform that guarantees our health care system will provide reasonable access, quality care, universal affordability and positive outcomes.

Simply getting more people insured will not necessarily address those criteria. Proposing public policy that is aimed at expanded coverage is a means to an end, not a political ploy nor an end in itself.

My sense on health care reform is that our system is fundamentally broken. We spend enormous sums of money to have mediocre to moderate outcomes. The system is in a death spiral that increases the costs at the expense of decreasing health.

I believe that the authority's proposals are our best chance to make a significant impact on the health and well-being of our constituents right now. In addition, this plan serves as the basis for further reforms in future years.

I have decided to embrace these recommendations and to work for their passage in the 2008 session for several reasons.

First of all, the plan approaches the problem from multiple strategies that improve health, expand and improve services, prevent disease, contain costs and expand coverage.

Secondly, it is a plan that is doable from a practical point of view. To be sure, nothing is easy or certain when it comes to proposed legislation, especially when addressing such a difficult issue. Nevertheless, this plan contains elements that have broad appeal and immediate policy payoffs that make it attractive across ideological lines.

The proposals on personal responsibility and prevention are important essentials to attract moderate to conservative policymakers. The lack of mandates or radical deconstructions of current delivery systems creates acceptability for those with market-driven preferences. The expansion of premium assistance is by no means modest and is targeted toward the most needy of our population. It is a policy that allows its supporters to claim the most expansive and comprehensive reform of health care in decades.

When I hear critics of the reform plan complain that they "can't find the beef," I direct them to that portion of the proposal that deals with premium assistance and assistance to small businesses. If the plan is successful:

- 20,000 additional children could be covered by Medicaid/HealthWave.
- 15,000 young adults could be covered who are currently uninsured.
- 39,000 low-income adults could be eligible for premium assistance.
- 12,000 small-business owners and their employees could gain access to affordable coverage.

A total of 74,000 Kansas individuals (about 25 percent of current uninsured) and 12,000 small businesses could see direct benefit and access to health coverage. That may not be prime rib, but it sure ain't tofu.

When taken in its entirety, this proposal has much to offer the citizens of Kansas by providing the Legislature with a strategy to improve health, reduce costs and expand coverage. It is a responsible beginning -- a first step that has the potential to improve the health and well-being of our state while creating a framework for subsequent expansion.

Nile Dillmore is a Democratic member of the Kansas House from Wichita.

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