

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Rep. Schaaf Drops AMA Membership, Urges Immediate Physician Exodus

*In response to the endorsement by the American Medical Association of the Senate Health Bill, Missouri State Representative Rob Schaaf, M.D., a practicing family physician, is dropping out of the AMA and urges fellow physicians to do the same.*

The AMA has ignored the best interests of patients, opting to protect special interests. Physicians need to send the AMA a strong message that they will not tolerate AMA's support of this horrible bill.

The proposal before the Senate ignores several basic problems with our health system while enlarging an already broken Medicaid program and burdening all patients with increased health insurance costs and taxes. Among other problems...

The high cost of defensive medicine due to frivolous lawsuits is not addressed.

Market reforms, such as allowing the purchase of insurance across state lines and the addition of transparency to the medical marketplace, would lower the cost of healthcare through increased competition but are left out of the bill.

The perverse incentives built into the Medicaid program are addressed for neither patients nor providers. While the bill includes a huge expansion of the Medicaid program, it does nothing to fix the problem patients have seeing specialists,

many of whom refuse to schedule adequate visit slots for Medicaid patients because of the insufficient payments for care. Medicaid would continue to pay physicians less than their cost of providing care. The Medicaid patients added to the program by the bill will further worsen the already severe access problem. The Medicare Physician Payment formula is broken and has led to many physicians refusing to see Medicare patients. The bill does not provide the needed fix.

Younger patients would be burdened with the cost of health insurance as a result of the prohibition against preexisting condition exclusions coupled with the mandate to purchase insurance.

Political payoffs have resulted in some states getting greater subsidies for Medicaid at the expense of other states such as Missouri under the bill.

Even though physician-owned hospitals have been shown to provide lower cost and more effective care to patients, physicians would be banned from future hospital ownership. This political payoff to the hospital industry will protect them from the competition needed to force down costs and will deny patients the benefits of better and less expensive care.

The perverse incentive of cost-based reimbursement of some providers, including hospitals, is not addressed.

Patients are not guaranteed access



to their own physicians, as under the bill, insurance companies would continue to be allowed to refuse panel membership to any physician willing to accept a company's terms. According to a recent poll, this simple reform is supported by over ninety percent of the public.

The bill contains more regulatory burdens on physicians and will make it harder for them to provide care to patients. Many older physicians would retire early as a result, frustrated with an already over-regulated medical practice. The employer mandates in the bill would strain many businesses, thus putting many workers out of work. This political payoff would enrich insurance companies.

Insurance companies would continue to enjoy exemption from antitrust law as a result of one senator's demand, blatantly protecting this special interest group that supported him.

The costs of Medicaid expansion would eventually become an unfunded mandate, straining the

budgets of states such as Missouri, which already has a severe budget problem.

Increased taxation of makers of medical devices would reduce innovation and increase costs for patients.

While some patients would receive free or subsidized health care, they would do so at the expense of fellow citizens, all of whom would see increased health insurance costs as a result of this bill. Congress has squandered an opportunity to make changes that would lower costs for everyone and instead, Congress plans to move us closer to socialized medicine. They are forcing this bill down the throats of the American public, which poll after poll show are in opposition.

I urge AMA member physicians to contact member services at (800) 262-3211, or by emailing msc@ama-assn.org, and drop membership until such time as AMA demands a meaningful bill before giving its support. He also urges physicians to retain membership in their state organizations, such as the Missouri State Medical Association, which has objected to the legislation before Congress.

Hopefully, if enough physicians act quickly, the AMA will realize the seriousness of this mistake and reverse it. If AMA does so, I will encourage physicians to reconsider, as I will, this painful decision to leave the organization.



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