

AMERICANS HAVE A RIGHT



TO REVIEW HEALTHCARE BILL

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by Lamar Alexander, October 2, 2009

Congress and the American people ought to have ample time to read important bills, like the current health care reform bill. Before we vote, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office should have time to look at it and tell us exactly how much it costs, and then the final version of the legislation should be posted on the Internet for at least 72 hours so that anybody who wants to can read the bill. The American people have a right to review any healthcare bill, and know exactly what it costs, before Congress acts. There are differences of opinion in the Senate and across the country; rewriting the rules for one-sixth of the American economy is too important and too complicated to rush through.

It's embarrassing to say to people that the Senate won't allow 72 hours to read a 2,000-page bill that spends \$1 trillion or \$1.5 trillion and will affect virtually everyone in America. The danger is that the Senate will just put the bills together from the various committees writing healthcare legislation and ram it through, and then we won't be able to ask the questions: "Is my state going to pay more taxes for Medicaid? Are my Medicare benefits going to be cut? Will this bill increase the national debt?" These are important questions, and we have a right to know the answers before we vote on any healthcare bill.

Governors across the country want to know how much it is going to cost their states. Recently the chairmen of the National Governors Association and Republican Governors

Association held a joint press conference, and they basically said, "If you're going to expand Medicaid in our states, if the federal government's going to do it, the federal government ought to pay for it."

I've thought for some time that any senator who votes to expand Medicaid in the states without paying for it at the federal level ought to be sentenced to go home and serve as governor for eight years to try to pay for it, raise taxes, and manage the program. Democratic as well as Republican governors are all essentially saying, "Don't do this to us. Our state revenues are down 17, 18, 20, 35 percent. If you're going to pass it, pay for it." That's a question that governors should have a chance to ask and that Congress should answer, and that's why we need at least 72 hours to read the bill.

If Congress and the rest of America had more time to read the bill, I believe most Americans would agree we should start over to get it right. Rather than taking a comprehensive approach, which Congress has proven it does not do well, I believe we should focus on reducing the costs of healthcare to individuals, families, and the government, and go step by step to re-earn the trust of the American people by fixing healthcare in that way. ■

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