

After a lengthy district work period, Congress's return to Washington has been marked by deliberations on multiple fronts. The primary focus, though, remains on health care. Much attention now turns to the U.S. Senate as it crafts its own version of health care legislation. Below is a review of the health care issue as well as an update on other key initiatives that will affect the strength and security of our nation.

Refocusing the Health Care Debate:

Thousands of Nebraskans have shared with me their thoughts on health care over the past several weeks. While serious questions about affordability and the need for reasonable reforms have been raised, many people expressed deep concern about the current House plan, which prioritizes a government-run public option.

As I continue to emphasize, the correct policy framework for debate should center on improving health outcomes, reducing costs, and protecting vulnerable persons. Without these objectives as a primary focus, the costs of our current health care system are simply shifted to a government-financing mechanism with significant consequences.

It is unclear when the House of Representatives will vote on its health care proposal, and the Washington debate now shifts to the U.S. Senate. It is my hope that Congress will refocus the health care discussion in the coming weeks, prioritizing improved health, reduced costs, and care for vulnerable persons. For a variety of commentary on this issue, please visit my website, <http://Fortenberry.house.gov>.

Too Many Laws, Too Little Time:

The stimulus bill passed by Congress earlier this year was more than a thousand pages long and cost nearly 900 billion dollars. Even so, congressional leaders allowed other Members of Congress and the American people just hours to review it before its final vote. Such haste in policymaking makes for poor outcomes. An ethics reform measure I proposed in 2006 suggested that Members of Congress and the public should have at least 72 hours to review legislation before it is voted upon. Recently I helped introduce legislation to enact this idea. It is only reasonable that both the people and their representatives have adequate time to review policy proposals before they are voted on in Congress.

Defunding ACORN:

You most likely have heard of the recent controversy surrounding the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). This organization is facing evidence of corruption so significant that federal agencies including the U.S. Census Bureau and the IRS have decided to sever all ties with it. In the last two weeks, both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have voted overwhelmingly to prevent this group from receiving taxpayer dollars. I supported the House provision to defund ACORN, and I am pleased the federal government has acted promptly in response to the organization's malfeasance.

Promoting Nuclear Security:

Nuclear weapons proliferation is a threat to the very existence of mankind. There needs to be an international commitment to stem the spread of nuclear materials and technologies to those who wish to do us harm. I am pleased the UN last week adopted a U.S.-led resolution to take concrete steps to reduce nuclear danger. The unanimous adoption of the resolution hopefully indicates a collective will of the responsible community of nations to work together to quell grave nuclear threats. However, lofty rhetoric and collegial expressions of commitment need to be met with action and enforcement by each nation. As co-founder of the House of Representatives Nuclear Security Caucus, I recently hosted a discussion about the pros and cons of the United States ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Now we learn of new evidence of Iran's nuclear intentions. The international community must act, or the world faces the prospect of a nuclear arms race in the volatile Middle East.

Assessing Military Operations in Afghanistan:

A classified memo that the top military commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, wrote to the President was recently made public. The general indicated that additional resources and more troops are needed in Afghanistan within the next year. As the military has pointed out, the situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. Given this development, I believe the President should direct General McChrystal to present a full assessment of operations in Afghanistan directly to Congress, as General Petraeus did when he first took command in Iraq. This situation is very serious. The American people deserve to know that decisions requiring sacrifice on the part of our military are fully informed and carefully deliberated.

Financial Reform that Centers on Strong Local Economies:

In his recent speech before Wall Street, President Obama was right to demand greater responsibility from the American financial industrial complex. One year and 16 trillion dollars of taxpayer liability at risk later, the American people are still shouldering the burden of the reckless behavior of the companies deemed "too big to fail" that triggered the economic collapse.

I am troubled, however, by the presupposition that greater global consolidation of financial systems is in our national or international interest. The global scale of the crisis of credit and confidence should give us pause to consider that our profound economic connectedness may actually intensify our problems. Local businesses and local financiers best know the needs of their communities and are in their very essence more transparent and accountable. Rather than risk becoming more intertwined in an internationalist financial industrial model, we should instead focus on encouraging the formation of strong local and regional economies, which are the proper models to build economic strength in America as well as the world's developing nations.

Many of you have written regarding your concerns and ideas on these and other issues. As always, please feel free to contact my office with your thoughts.