

As you know, the House of Representatives narrowly passed the Senate health care bill late in the night on Sunday, March 21. I joined 211 of my colleagues in voting against this bill.

Over the last several months, thousands of Nebraskans shared with me their perspectives regarding health care reform. No one disputes the diagnosis: our health care system must be strengthened, and America needs the right kind of health care reform that lowers costs, improves health outcomes, and protects vulnerable persons.

From my perspective and analysis, the Senate bill, now signed into law by President Obama, does not substantively address the underlying cost-drivers that have led to access and affordability problems. It substantially shifts costs to more unsustainable government spending, erodes health care liberties, and increases health care expenses for many Americans. A significant component of this bill, which will impact one-sixth of the entire American economy, is a vast expansion of the Medicaid program, which continues to be on an unsustainable cost trajectory.

With a more pragmatic and bipartisan approach, I believe Congress potentially could have reached 80 percent agreement on such critical issues as prevention, health and wellness, and more affordable insurance options for small businesses, farmers, families, and vulnerable persons.

Even though this version of health care reform has become law, efforts for more patient-centered health care reforms will not end. I will continue to advocate commonsense measures that address the rising costs of care without shifting the burden to the taxpayer. I have long supported enhanced Health Savings Accounts, increased hospice care reimbursement, and some measures that are in the current bill, such as helping to cover persons with preexisting conditions.

For the good of all Americans, Congress should have worked in a more collaborative, incremental approach on these, and other, solutions for a better health care system. Thank you to all who contacted my office during this long debate and offered thoughts and ideas. Your input and perspective were valuable to me and my office, and will continue to be as we move forward.