



PRESS RELEASE

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Salt Lake City—Utah’s congressional delegation returned Tuesday to Washington DC, marking the conclusion of the August Recess and the renewal of negotiations around health reform. In Salt Lake City today, a group of everyday Utahns gathered to share their experience of trying to get or keep quality, affordable health coverage and to explain how the proposed national health reforms would benefit them.

The Utah Health Policy Project led the unique roundtable discussion. “Whether you are uninsured or insured, all Utahns,--stand to gain from the proposed national health reforms,” said Judi Hilman, Executive Director of Utah Health Policy Project. “Utahns support comprehensive health reform when they understand the positive impacts of acting this year—and the cost of doing nothing.”

Ben Gaddis was one Utahn who participated in the roundtable discussion. The current health care system serves him moderately well. He and his family receive coverage through his employer and can still afford his part of the premium, though it is increasing every year. However, Ben knows that his policy leaves him vulnerable to bankruptcy were he to experience a major medical event. Furthermore, when he goes into the doctor’s office he is unable to get a cost estimate for medical procedures, leaving him to wonder how big his bill will actually be. “As an insured Utahn, I urge our congressional delegation to support the proposed national health reforms *this year*,” says Ben. “Health reform will foster competition, something our current system does poorly, and rein in costs for all of us.”

[One in 4 Utah families will spend more than 10% of their income \(too much!\) on health care costs this year.](#) Of those, 87% will be *insured*. The Hills are one of those families. Their 10 year old daughter has a chronic condition that requires regular visits to the family doctor. The Hills are also charged a much higher premium based on their daughter’s health status. “The reality for families is that they cannot count on health insurance to shield them from financial ruin. With health care costs growing faster than median wages, it is no surprise that this family is paying more than 10 or even 25 percent of their income on health care,” explained Jessica Kendrick, Community Engagement Director of the Utah Health Policy Project. “National health reform will bring financial security and peace of mind to Utah families by preventing insurance companies from placing annual or lifetime limits on coverage. Even better, low to middle income Utahns purchasing subsidized insurance through the new exchange will have a cap on their annual out-of-pocket costs.”

Nancy Mitchell is a senior citizen enrolled on Medicare. “National health reform will make Medicare better,” says Nancy. “It closes the doughnut hole, promotes preventive care by reducing my out-of-pocket costs, and improves the solvency of Medicare for my grandchildren’s generation.”

Karlene works for a small nonprofit that simply cannot afford to provide health coverage to their employees. Unfortunately, Karlene can’t afford coverage on her own, and this is why she is uninsured. A few years ago, she came down with a severe case of pneumonia and was admitted to the hospital for 4 days. She was enrolled in the state’s Primary Care Network, but had no hospital coverage. Thus, Karlene faced thousands of dollars in health care bills. Thankfully, the hospital donated much of the care, but now Karlene avoids getting care she needs because of her concern about the cost. Of course, this impacts her productivity at work as it takes her longer to recover when she gets sick. “I want to have health insurance, but I just can’t afford it! National health reform will expand affordable coverage to me and several hundred-thousand Utahns like me.”

Karen Buchi serves as the President of the American Academy of Pediatricians, Utah Chapter. As a pediatrician, Karen sees on a daily basis how the current health care system fails Utah's kids. "Covering our kids is fiscally responsible—we should spend health dollars wisely on preventive care and management rather than expensive emergency room care," says Karen. "Furthermore, health reform will give me the tools as a physician to access the latest research outlining the most effective treatments so my patients and I can make informed decisions about their care and avoid ineffective, wasteful treatments."

Tom Hori owns a small business in Bountiful and is active in the Davis Chamber of Commerce. He still provides coverage to his employees, but the costs escalate every year and it is becoming increasingly difficult to continue providing coverage—especially in this economy. A survey of Utah small business owners earlier this summer that found that 64% of small businesses say health reform is important to getting the economy back on track; and 68% agree that the state and federal governments must be partners in reforming health care. (A summary of the survey results is available [here](#)).

"As these stories demonstrate, there are many reasons to support national health reform," says Hilman. "But the top 5 reasons why all Utahns—whether insured or uninsured—should support health reform are:

- To stop insurance companies from being able to deny coverage because of pre-existing conditions
- To give Utahns peace of mind knowing they can get and keep quality, affordable coverage despite life's up and downs
- To ensure you can receive medical treatment when you need it, without risking bankruptcy
- To provide small businesses—the engine of our economy—relief from rising health care costs
- And most of all...because the status quo is unsustainable."

The event today relayed a variety of perspectives from Utahns who are insured, underinsured, uninsured, small business owners, and providers. "These stories underscore the need for national health reform *this year*," says Jessica Kendrick. "Everyone has a family member or a friend with a similar story. Health care is something that touches all of our lives and we need an American solution that benefits all of us. We simply cannot afford to wait. If you support health reform, then please sign onto our statement of consensus, Utahns Support National Health Reform: The Status Quo is Unsustainable." The statement is available on Utah Health Policy Project's website at: <http://www.healthpolicyproject.org/NationalSignOn.html>. More information about what is being proposed and how health reform will impact Utahns is also available at their website: <http://www.healthpolicyproject.org/NationalReform.html>

For additional health care stories or for more information, please contact Jessica Kendrick at 801-433-2299 or Jessica@healthpolicyproject.org

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