

Health Care Town Hall Report

In August 2009, Republican Congressional Candidate Rob Curnock (TX-17) hosted a series of town hall forums throughout District 17 to hear from citizens on the issue of health care. Those present could speak to address their concerns, and paper surveys were also available for Central Texans to express their views.

The town hall events were announced to all major media outlets in the district (print, radio, television) and several media outlets provided good coverage of the events. We believe sufficient notice was given to allow citizens from all points of view to be able to attend an event near them. Events were held in Waco, Bryan, Burleson and Clifton, so there was an event within an hour's drive from almost every household in the district.

Additionally, media announcements and direct emails to many throughout the district included instructions for submitting feedback on health care to a special email account. All of this data was collected and compiled during September, and the summary is presented here.

Overwhelmingly, the citizens of Central Texas are opposed to the several health care bills currently making their way through Congress. Specific attention was given to HR 3200, as it was the only released legislation dealing with health care that was available at the time.

Town hall participants

Remarks made by Central Texans at the 4 town hall events closely mirrored responses from the surveys. One story from the Waco Town Hall event was particularly important in illustrating the real-world challenges people have with government involvement in the health care industry.

Jason M. attended the Waco event with his wife and daughter, who is handicapped. He spoke about his concern that under government-provided health care he would no longer be able to care for his daughter. Even if there were no panels to ration care, which is likely under any government health care plan, he is almost certain to lose the excellent health insurance he has with his employer, a major reason why he decided to work where he does. This is just one family of many across the district who will be personally impacted by the decisions our elected representatives make in Washington regarding health care.

Survey responses

A total of 181 surveys were received from the 4 events, after removing obvious duplicates and those that were not substantially completed. Most of the surveys were completed in the major population counties (McLennan, Johnson, Brazos).

More than 43% of Central Texans present indicated they had read all or part of HR 3200, and another 35% were familiar with portions of the bill from media and online reports. But every person surveyed (100%) said that they expected their elected representatives to fully read and understand a bill before voting on it.

Regarding their current health insurance coverage, almost 90% of respondents indicated their current insurance was excellent or good, needing no changes or only minor changes. A full 57% said their coverage was excellent and should not be changed at all. Five percent of respondents reported having no health insurance at all, and only 1 respondent favored a complete overhaul of health insurance.

Respondents are generally pleased with their relationship with their personal doctor. More than 75% reported an excellent relationship and more than 20% reported a good relationship. Only two respondents reported having no doctor to see (even though 10 had reported having no health insurance).

Respondents were offered several choices for what the federal government could do to improve health care; they could select as many responses as they wanted. Several respondents, 5.5%, wrote “No Government Involvement” and did not complete any of the options. For those who did indicate one or more options, the percentage of respondents indicating each option is listed below:

Option	Percentage
Pass lawsuit abuse reforms to keep doctor costs lower	88.4%
Provide opportunities for competition across state lines for private insurance	77.3%
Provide tax incentives to encourage individual Health Savings Accounts	72.9%
Provide tax incentives to allow small businesses and individuals to purchase private insurance	72.9%
Allow organizations and small businesses to form private cooperative groups for better insurance rates	60.8%
Require health care providers to present cost information to patients in advance and in a clear manner	49.2%
Set nationwide minimum standards for private health insurance coverage	5.0%
Expand the number of people eligible for Medicaid coverage	3.9%
Implement a single-payer system, funding all health care from the federal government and eliminating private insurance	0.6%
Offer a government-run health insurance option	0%

Best features of current health insurance and health care

Respondents were asked about the best features of their current health insurance and health care, and what things should definitely not be changed by the government. The overwhelming majority indicated doctor choice and treatment

choice was very important to them. Many also cited easy access to quality, affordable health care as important in their current health care, and indicated they do not want the government to interfere with employer-provided plans.

“I should be able to choose my own doctor and make decisions about my prognosis and treatment with no government interference.” - Patricia L., Bryan

“Government has no place in standing between a doctor and a patient.” - Gary W., Valley Mills

Elements of current health insurance/care that should be changed

When asked what elements of their current health insurance or care respondents would like to see changed, several cited tort reform, removing barriers, providing tax incentives, Medicare reform, and fixing problems with veteran care and with COBRA. One respondent cited poor government-provided health care for Native Americans as an example of how the federal government would run health care for the rest of us.

When asked what the federal government should do to implement these changes, overwhelmingly respondents said “Nothing!” Respondents questioned the Constitutionality of government-provided health care. One respondent pointed out that the bureaucratic infrastructure needed to serve millions more people under a government-provided plan would lead to rationing of care.

“Tort reform and frivolous lawsuits need to be addressed before the government tries to change my health coverage.” - Debbie A., Waco

“Employers should be allowed to supplement, but not limit my choices. It is time to get employers out from between me and my insurance.” - Earle S., College Station

“My husband is a 100% disabled vet. Give veterans more doctors & clinics. Expand veterans’ prescription coverage.” - Patricia R., Burleson

“Work to privatize Social Security and Medicare so that government is out of that business entirely.” - Nancy C., Bryan

“Where in the Constitution does it state that we are guaranteed the right to health care? The government should not be involving itself in a private industry, period!” - Miranda R., Bryan

“I am privately insured and happy.” - Matt J., College Station

Specific feedback about HR 3200

Respondents were asked for specific feedback regarding HR 3200. Many direct responses are listed below.

"Keep your hands off my healthcare!" - Anne W., Waco

"It is not authorized by the Constitution!" - Al G., Burleson

"This bill was written by a bunch of Communists: The Apollo Group. It needs to be thrown out and the government needs to get out of the business of trying to rake over our lives!" - Martha B., College Station

"A public plan will cause my doctor to go out of business and make private insurance dry up." - James B., College Station

"Everything about this is wrong: it is an attack on reasonable people & on those who don't know any better. It preys on people who are afraid & who are in need." - Mark C., Bryan

"HR3200 should be killed. There should be no compromise." - Earle S., College Station

"Although I agree that the healthcare system needs improvement, I object to the entire bill as it seems to have very little to do with health care and a whole lot to do with the redistribution of power, and the removal of freedom and privacy." - Lynn A., Burleson

"Do not allow government control of healthcare or any form of single-payer plan. For anything that is passed, it must be mandatory that Congress can have only that & no other options." - Jim S., Clifton

"That bill is not good for America! Congress should not be in the health care business, or in any business competing with private enterprise or individuals. The bill should be voted down." - David D., Burleson

"I think we have made it clear that we don't want this, please don't force it on us." - Amanda D., Joshua

"This bill is too big, too expensive, and is very cloudy." - Frances S., College Station

"It needs to be thrown out completely. I can't see any good in it because of the bad. The main thing is my (handicapped) daughter will be cast aside and care given to a healthy, able-bodied person instead." - Melissa M., Waco

"I believe that HR3200 should be voted down in its entirety because it would lead to socialized health care." - John C., Burleson

"It is socialism; it cannot be paid for unless we borrow, tax, and put it on the backs of our children. It requires too much control over our lives. I see nothing positive about this." - Suzy A., Rio Vista

"The language is nebulous, open to much interpretation. Could have separate bills to address separate issues, beginning with tort reform." - Sharon H., College Station

"It STINKS! It is too much, too fast, and it gives the federal government far more control over people's health care than is warranted!" - Elizabeth H., China Spring

"It is too big and complicated for people to read and understand. I do NOT want this package passed under any circumstances." - Richard K., Waco

"Require hospitals to determine services by ID of illegals." - Carol W., Grandview

"I do not think non-citizens should be given free health care." - Cynthia G., Riesel

"The government cannot fund abortions." - Catherine M., College Station

Other suggestions for Congress on health care

The final open-ended question on the surveys provided respondents a chance to give any other suggestions to Congress regarding health care. A representative selection of responses is included below.

“Stick to defense and regulation of commerce, and leave citizens alone!” - D. A., Bryan

“Keep the government out of it! Let the free market do its job UNHINDERED!” - Martha B., College Station

“Get their hands off of all programs. Give us back our country!” - Janet B., Rainbow

“Less government and more citizen control.” - Maudie T., Briaroaks

“Take one issue at a time.” - Bernice S., College Station

“More in-depth study before voting. This is too important to figure out in 6 or 7 months.” - Gail H., Deanville

“Take better care of our veterans.” - Harold L., Clifton

“Incentives to get more doctors, nurses, and physician assistants into the health care system.” - Fred T., Burleson

“Allow competition and the ability to pick and choose what should be covered in my plan.” - Talbot B., Burleson

“Look only at those who really CAN’T get insurance coverage any other way. No coverage for noncitizens, for employed who ‘opt out’ of their own work’s plan. Per Huckabee, this comes down to about 5 million folks, not 43 million.” - Mary S., Clifton

“Tort reform; limit lawsuits and damages. Reverse directions and get government OUT of health care!” - Bill W., Grandview

“Listen to the people who gave you that office.” - Amanda D., Joshua

“Ship illegals home! Quit treating them!” - George D., Cleburne

“Congress needs to respect the people’s requests and not run anything through.” - Cynthia G., Riesel

Email responses

Email responses generally followed those received on the surveys. One respondent mentioned the cost of advances in medical technology: “A major factor driving up health care costs is the expense required to improve and advance health care. If we dispensed the health care of 1950 today, our costs would be miniscule. The U.S. advances came from private research and risk.”

Conclusion

It’s evident from the response at the Town Hall events, through written feedback, and from email responses received on the issue that Central Texans are not in favor of the many health-care bills currently pending before the House and Senate. It seems that the best approach for a legislator is to vote against any plan currently being considered in Congress and start over, take more time to make wise choices, and be responsive to the concerns of the people of District 17.