

Leading on Health Care

Pennsylvanians continue to struggle with the increased costs of health care. Congressman Altmire believes that individuals should not be forced to decide between paying the mortgage or their monthly health care premiums. Seniors should not need to choose between paying for groceries or for the prescription drugs needed for their treatment. He has heard hundreds of stories from constituents who are simply trying to make ends meet, and are finding it harder and harder to do so. Health care must be made more affordable in the U.S. and we need to have a national dialogue, with all parties involved, in how we can accomplish it

Congress can do much more to ensure that all Americans, regardless of age, gender, race, or socio-economic status, have access to high quality, affordable health care. Over 47 million Americans are uninsured despite the fact that the U.S. spends the most per capita on health care than all other developed nations. Congressman Altmire knows this is unacceptable and plans to use his health care background and expertise to improve how health care is delivered in the U.S.

Improving the Quality of Patient Care

On September 26, 2008, Congressman Altmire introduced the Quality FIRST Act (H.R. 7067) to reward hospitals for the quality of care provided to patients. The bill would implement a Medicare value-based purchasing program for hospitals — an approach that has been recommended by the Institute of Medicine and the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC). A 250-hospital demonstration project showed significant improvements in patient care and, if implemented nationally, could prevent 70,000 deaths per year. For more information, see [Quality FIRST Dear Colleague and an overview of the Quality FIRST Act].

Protecting Seniors Access to Medical Equipment and Supplies

For months, Congressman Altmire worked to ensure the highly flawed durable medical equipment (DME) competitive bidding program would not limit seniors' access to the medical suppliers who can best meet their needs. He chaired a hearing last October to examine the program and its potential impact on small businesses, led letters to the Small Business Administration and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and ultimately called for the program to be delayed. As part of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (H.R. 6331), he was successful in including an 18-month delay of the program at no additional cost to taxpayers. For more information, see [Altmire Votes to Override President's Veto of Medicare Bill].

Strengthening Medicare, Prescription Drug Coverage

Enacted on July 15, 2008, the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (H.R. 6331) prevents a scheduled 10 percent payment reduction for physicians, enhances preventive and mental health benefits, improves programs for low-income beneficiaries, and extends expiring provisions for rural providers. It also includes a provision introduced by Congressman Altmire last year that will provide relief to millions of Medicare beneficiaries who could be penalized for not signing up for prescription drug coverage during their enrollment period. As a result of Congressman Altmire's efforts, a barrier to coverage, known as the late enrollment penalty, will be permanently waived for those who can least afford it. For more information, see [Altmire Votes to Override President's Veto of Medicare Bill].

Altmire Appointed to New Dem Health Care Task Force

On January 29, 2008, Congressman Altmire was appointed to the Health Care Task Force launched by the New Democrat Coalition. The initiative is aimed at dramatically improving Americans' access to quality, affordable health insurance through prevention, innovation and competition. For more information, see [Altmire, New Dems Offer Roadmap Forward on Health IT].

Covering 10 Million Children

Last year, Congress made repeated attempts to reauthorize and expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) as a first step in ensuring the coverage of more Americans. The House and Senate agreed to provide \$35 billion to meet the health care needs of children across the country at no additional cost to taxpayers. Unfortunately, the president twice vetoed this bipartisan legislation to provide health care to 10 million children. For Congressman Altmire's statement on this issue, see [Altmire Statement on SCHIP Override].