



JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

ROBERT F. BENNETT, CHAIRMAN

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CHAIRMAN BENNETT EXPLORES WAYS TO RESHAPE THE FUTURE OF AMERICA'S HEALTH

Washington, DC—Senator Bob Bennett, Chairman of the Joint Economic Committee (JEC), hosted a roundtable discussion today to explore ways to improve the health of Americans, and thereby reduce future health care costs. The roundtable featured U.S. Surgeon General, Richard Carmona. The panel also included Jim Oatman of FortisHealth, who brought to light innovations that health insurers are developing to encourage wellness, and Dr. Diane Rowland, a national expert on issues involving Medicaid and the uninsured.

“The current debate on health care is dominated by a discussion of benefits, deductibles, insurance coverage, and payment levels. The attention of policymakers has been drawn away from the most important health care issue – the actual health of the American people,” said Chairman Bennett.

America has the preeminent health care system in the world. America also has the most expensive health care system in the world. Despite our preeminence and our spending, there are some disturbing trends emerging with serious implications for the health of the American people in the future. The roundtable participants agreed that many of the nation’s chronic health problems caused by smoking, obesity, and other lifestyle issues are completely preventable, and that the American health care system needs to allow responsible for their own health and prudent consumers of their own health care.

Some ideas that came to the fore in the hearing include creating financial incentives to encourage individuals to follow healthy eating plans and engage in physical activity, creating medical databases to more accurately track an individual’s health status to provide better care, and improved screening programs to catch medical conditions early.

“Our economy is the wonder of the world,” said Bennett. “Despite a series of economic shocks, we have bounced back and our economic future looks good...until we start looking at rapidly rising health care costs. In the next 10 years or so, baby boomers will be retiring and the strain on our Medicare system will be staggering if we don’t strive to do something about it. Through the free exchange of ideas such as we’ve had today, we can encourage new programs and needed legislation that can truly benefit the American people and strengthen our economy.”

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