

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

POLL: Majority of Physicians Reject Current Bills *Two-thirds say bills are not real reform, want step-by-step measures*

March 15, 2010

Dear Colleague,

Unlike Washington politicians and insurance company bureaucrats, doctors and nurses personally heal and care for patients. As a physician, I must earn the trust of my patients so we can work together to help them get and stay well. It is no surprise then, that while most Americans have concerns about the health care system, physicians are the most trusted voices in the health care reform debate. In fact, nearly 8 in 10 Americans said they most trust physicians to recommend the right thing for health reform, according to a recent Gallup poll.¹

As a practicing family physician who has delivered over 4,000 babies, I think it is constructive and helpful for Americans to know what their doctor thinks about the health reform debate. However, I am gravely concerned that the voice of America's physicians has, at best, been largely ignored in the health debate. At worst, special interest groups and lobbying organizations have co-opted the voice of many physicians during the course of the debate.

To help amplify physicians' voices and perspectives in our national debate, I want to introduce you to over 110,000 physicians in the Sermo community. Sermo.com is the nation's largest online physician community. Sermo is a forum "where practicing U.S. physicians—spanning 68 specialties and all 50 states—collaborate on difficult cases and exchange observations about drugs, devices and clinical issues."²

Sermo also provides a valuable virtual meeting place for physicians to come together and discuss health reform. Last year I had the pleasure on several occasions of engaging the Sermo community about specific provisions in the health bills before Congress.³

Last week I engaged with Sermo physicians again, this time asking them to share their overall thoughts and concerns about the health bills in Congress.⁴ Thousands of practicing physicians responded, and I want to share their thoughts with you.

- When asked what Congress should do about health reform, only 1 in 10 physicians said Congress should push the current bills through, while nearly two thirds of physicians said Congress should start over and work on targeted, step-by-step solutions.
- Two thirds of physicians responding said the bills in Congress do a very poor job of achieving real, sustainable, affordable health reform that is good for patients and physicians. Only 2% of physicians said the health bills do a very good job of achieving these goals.
- Two thirds of physicians responding said they generally think the federal government should decrease its involvement in, and regulation of, health care in America.

¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/126338/Obama-Retains-Trust-Congress-Healthcare.aspx>

² <http://www.sermo.com/about/introduction>

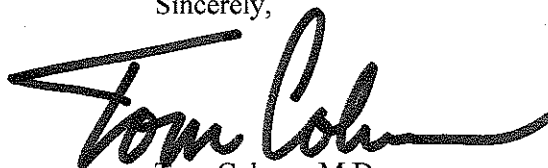
³ www.Sermo.com/reform/Engage_with_Serators

⁴ http://www.sermo.com/results/posts/47666_sen_coburn_wants_to_share_your_opinions_with_the_us_senate/survey_results.html

- Over 9 in 10 physicians responding said the majority of politicians in the U.S. House and Senate do not understand the fundamental problems in American health care.
- Nine in 10 physicians responding said Congress has done a poor or very poor job of listening to the concerns of physicians during the health reform debate in 2009.
- When asked that they find most concerning with the health bills in Congress, 7 in 10 physicians said they were most concerned about the size of the bills, the complexity of the reforms, and the potential unintended consequences of the legislation. Eight in 10 physicians said the bills do not do enough to reduce the practice of defensive medicine. Roughly half of the physicians said they were concerned that patients would not be accountable for making healthy choices.
- Two thirds of physicians identified repealing and replacing Medicare's physician reimbursement formula (the sustainable growth rate, or SGR) as key to health reform. This formula determines reimbursements to physicians who care for our country's 45 million seniors, but the current health bills in Congress do not address this broken formula. In fact, on page 17 of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office's letter to Sen. Reid, Congress' budget experts explain that the deficit neutrality of the health bills assume reimbursement "rates would be reduced by about 23 percent for 2011."⁵ This dramatic reduction in reimbursements would jeopardize seniors' access to care.
- In his September 9, 2009 address to Congress, President Obama promised he would "not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits -- either now or in the future." When asked how likely they think it is that the health bills in Congress will not increase the deficit not by "one dime", three out of 4 physicians said this was very unlikely. Only 6% of physicians said the current bills are likely or very likely to not increase the deficit.
- When asked what are the main issues health reform should address, 7 in 10 physicians said reform should reduce administrative paperwork, the costs of which in part are passed on to patients. Over 8 in 10 physicians said measures which reduce the practice of defensive medicine are key to reform. As a recent poll showed that potentially 1 in 4 dollars can be attributed to defensive medicine practices.⁶
- Roughly half of physicians identified the need to not add to our national debt or budget deficits as key to reform, and about the same number pointed to reducing waste, fraud, and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid as critical to reform. Only 1 in 10 physicians said an individual mandate to buy health insurance was primary to reform.

The results of my conversation with the Sermo community may not be the result of scientific polling, but I believe they are largely representative of many of the issues that concern the majority of American's physicians. As Congressional leaders push to pass health bills that the majority of Americans have rejected, it is not too late to work together on bipartisan, sustainable reform which will lower costs and increase access to patients while addressing the concerns of our nation's physicians. I hope you and other Congressional lawmakers will listen to what America's physicians think are the important issues in health reform.

Sincerely,



Tom Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator

⁵ http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/107xx/doc10731/Reid_letter_11_18_09.pdf

⁶ <http://www.jacksonhealthcare.com/online-media-room/press-releases/gallup-defensive-medicine-release.aspx>