

## Harkin ready to fight for health care (Cedar Rapids Gazette- November 16)

By Paul Barton

WASHINGTON - Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, doesn't mince words about Republicans' goal of repealing the new health care law next year: not on his watch.

As chairman of the Senate's Health, Education and Labor Committee, as well as the Appropriations subcommittee dealing with such matters, Harkin sits well positioned to guard President Obama's signature achievement, the Affordable Care and Patient Protection Act of 2010.

'There is no doubt they are going to try to do that, but it will not get past the Senate,' the senator said in an interview.

Although the act aims to bridge the health care coverage gap for at least 30 million of the nation's 51 million uninsured, GOP leaders insist more good would come from simpler, market-oriented insurance and legal reforms, ones they argue would be less expensive, less intrusive and less bureaucratic.

Their prescription would include eliminating barriers to health insurance competition, especially restrictions on selling policies across state lines, as well as tort reforms to lower medical malpractice claims and favorable tax treatment for individually and family-purchased insurance.

Short of outright repeal, something even Republicans know is a long shot with Obama still in the White House, the GOP's most outspoken members talk of finding another means to legislatively sidetrack it. One oft-mentioned possibility involves using the House appropriations process - which Republicans will control - to deny the funding needed to implement the new law.

But while spending bills start in the House, the Senate has to agree with how they are written.

'I will stop any effort to defund the health care law,' said Harkin, 70, now in his fifth term.

Further, the senator said, most of the money to operate the new law flows automatically and does not have to be appropriated.

While conservatives claim the Nov. 2 results were a mandate to undo the law, Harkin responded; 'They're wrong. The election was about a mandate to get our economy going again and get people back to work.' Although provisions to make coverage more affordable won't take effect until 2014, some basic benefits became effective in September. They included protection from denial of coverage due to pre-existing conditions, and letting parents' keep their kids on their health plan until age 26.

'As more and more people find out what's in this health care bill, they like it and they want to keep it,' Harkin predicted.

While getting a haircut recently in Washington, the senator said, his barber told him his own two kids could now stay on his health plan for four more years due to the Affordable Care Act, and that it would be \$10,000 cheaper than policies in their own names.

'Do the Republicans want to raise taxes on my barber?' Harkin asked.

Meanwhile, Republicans also talk of undoing or dramatically cutting funding for numerous other domestic programs.

After they retake the House, many Republicans and Tea Party candidates 'started brandishing their swords, crowbars and pickaxes,' Harkin said.

'But pretty soon they are going to come up against reality. The reality is the American people don't want their government torn down. They want things fixed.' He said they especially don't want to lose ways of helping the disadvantaged 'advance up the ladder of economic activity.' Republicans and Tea Party members, he predicted, will face 'a rude awakening when they start to try to dismantle some of these programs.'

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