



In Iowa's Interest:

Hands Off Medicaid!

by Senator Tom Harkin

As President Obama and House Speaker John Boehner continue negotiations on the so-called 'fiscal cliff,' I have one simple message: hands off Medicaid!

Federal health programs that millions of Americans rely on should not be on the bargaining table. Slowing the growth of healthcare spending is certainly necessary, and that's why I was proud to sponsor the most significant health care reform in decades: the Affordable Care Act – a law that tackles cost containment from every angle, while providing essential care to Americans who need it most. By 2014, the Affordable Care Act will cover 180,000 Iowans who are currently uninsured. Cutting Medicaid funding now will only hurt the poorest Iowans and shift costs to beneficiaries, taxpayers, and state government.

I have also been concerned by Governor Branstad's resistance to Medicaid expansion. This is not what the people of Iowa voted for in November. A large majority of Iowans rejected the Republicans' plans to repeal the Affordable Care Act and to dismantle Medicaid. It's time for the Governor to do what Iowans want.

Stopping the expansion of Medicaid will cost Iowa an estimated \$140 million in "uncompensated care" – care that people currently get for free when visiting the emergency room. If the state expands this program, Medicaid spending in Iowa is projected to actually *decrease* by 2.6 percent and over the next decade – Iowa could save almost \$2 billion if our state fully participates in the insurance exchanges and the Medicaid expansion.

The Medicaid program is a lifeline to hundreds of thousands of middle class American families who have children with lifelong disabilities, including Down syndrome and autism. Instead of cutting these families off from a critical lifeline, we should strengthen the long-term financial viability of the program and reassure these families that America will not turn its back on them when they need help the most.

It's time to concentrate on the real issues in this 'fiscal cliff' debate, beginning with the need for the most fortunate and wealthy Americans to pay their fair share in taxes.

For more information, including recent statements and speeches on this issue, please visit <http://www.harkin.senate.gov/>.