

January 21, 2009

Editorial Department
Star Tribune
425 Portland Ave
Minneapolis, MN 55488

Dear Editor,

OP/ED: Doctors Urge Governor to Show He Understands Health Care Needs

In talking about the state's budget choices, Governor Pawlenty was right on the mark when he said legislators have to keep in mind the families sitting at the kitchen table wrestling with tough questions: "How do we pay these bills? How do we fix the car? How do we pay this mortgage? How are we going to afford college or even retire someday?"

But he missed some really hard questions: "Now that I've lost my job, how can we afford health insurance? Should I ask my doctor about this lump—or wait until we can afford to do something about it? Should we put off having the kids' sore throats checked out? Should I skip refilling my high blood pressure medicine?"

In the long run, making the wrong decisions can be disastrous...and won't even save money.

If you lose your job, and someone in your family is chronically ill, or needs prenatal care, or gets sick, you're in a tight fix. COBRA is too expensive for most families.

This is a problem more and more families will have to struggle with as unemployment rates rise.

They need a safety net.

Fortunately there's MinnesotaCare to help working families who don't have access to employer-provided insurance, General Assistance Medical Care for low-income adults, and Medical Assistance for low-income families, pregnant women, and seniors.

Unfortunately, Governor Pawlenty has indicated that these safety net programs – which are more important than ever in tough economic times – are not going to be priorities.

In his State of the State address, the governor vowed not to raise taxes, not to cut education or public safety and, at the same time, to cut tax rates on Minnesota corporations in half.

That suggests that health care may bear the brunt of his budget cuts. The governor promised only to protect “current health care eligibility for children.”

Kids whose parents lose their job in the future may be out of luck.

Pawlenty’s approach—meant to stimulate Minnesota’s economy and job growth—should not ignore current need.

Ignoring the immediate need for health care, won’t even save money. The costs of providing care to people without insurance are shifted onto private payers, which means higher premiums, especially for small employers. People who put off seeing a doctor or getting preventive care, end up getting sicker.

We Minnesota physicians are urging Gov. Pawlenty to come up with a budget that pays attention to the need for safety net programs during this economic crisis. Funding for public programs should be part of a long-term health care reform strategy that is fair, doesn’t just shift costs around and makes sure all Minnesotans have access to health care.

We urge the Governor to listen to his own advice to lawmakers regarding that family at the kitchen table, “Let’s show them that we understand what they face.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noel R. Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

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