

# KEEP WHAT WORKS, FIX WHAT'S BROKEN

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*Congressman John Tanner represents Tennessee's 8th District. He serves on the Ways and Means Committee, chairing the Social Security Subcommittee, and on the Foreign Affairs Committee. A veteran of the U.S. Navy and Tennessee Army National Guard, he chairs the U.S. delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, serving a two-year term as its president.*

I want to talk with you for just a moment about the current state of the healthcare reform debate taking place in Tennessee and across the country.

The Blue Dogs, which I helped found, were instrumental in getting Congressional leaders to hold off a vote on any of the healthcare reform bills currently pending before the House. We wanted to ensure members of Congress would have the August break in the legislative calendar to talk with our constituents. I think this approach has been constructive.

Healthcare is a highly personal and emotional issue because we all have health issues. Therefore, I spent several weeks visiting the 19 counties that make up our Congressional district.

I have talked with providers, patients, healthcare administrators, seniors, veterans, small business owners, civic leaders, and other families, those with health coverage and those without, about how our healthcare system works today.

Through face-to-face meetings with groups and individuals plus a series of telephone town hall meetings, including one hosted by AARP, I talked with more than 15,000 8th District residents during the August district work period. We are also hearing from thousands of middle and west Tennesseans taking a moment to return surveys published in newspapers throughout our district.

Many people have ideas, sometimes similar, sometimes different, about how we can address these issues. Most of us agree that the goals in addressing healthcare are to keep what works in our current system and fix what is broken.

Too often, people in Washington think we live in an either/or world. Those on the far left and those on the far right seem to think that every play has to be an 80-yard Hail Mary touchdown pass. Many of us who find ourselves somewhere in the middle prefer a series of first downs, in this case incremental changes to fix what is broken within the system without harming patient care.

So as the House is back in session, I am working with the Blue Dogs and other colleagues to

address these principles with regard to healthcare reform:

- **Cost savings.** Medical care and health insurance costs are skyrocketing for individuals, families, veterans, employers, medical providers, and government. We must look for savings without harming patient care.
- **Solving inefficiencies.** Oftentimes, there is duplication in medical exams, prescriptions, and consultations. Investing in electronic medical records, better coordination among providers, and addressing the practice of defensive medicine will help save money and improve quality.
- **Ensuring that people with pre-existing conditions can get healthcare coverage.** I talked with a small-business owner from Weakley County who has had colon cancer. Fortunately, he is in remission, but no one will insure him, and he worries that if he gets sick again, he will lose his business and his employees will lose their jobs. Individuals should be able to get affordable, private health insurance, even with pre-existing conditions.
- **Keeping our employer-based healthcare system.**

I did not feel these principles were adequately met in the version of healthcare reform legislation that came before the Ways and Means Committee in July, so I voted against that version of the legislation. Healthcare is a very complicated issue that affects us all, and this dialogue is ongoing.

Because accurate information is crucial in the discussion of any issue this complicated and important, I hope all Tennesseans will carefully follow the debate and seek informed answers to the questions they have about any proposals in Congress and around the country.

I want to thank all the 8th District residents who have taken the time to talk with me. I also appreciate your interest in this dialogue about how we can keep what works in our system and fix what is broken. As the legislative process moves forward, I will continue to stay in touch. ■