

RECOGNIZING THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENACTMENT OF MEDICAID AND MEDICARE

RECOGNIZING THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENACTMENT OF MEDICAID AND MEDICARE

(House of Representatives - July 29, 2009)

Mr. Speaker, as we continue with the debate surrounding health reform, I wish to take a moment to recognize the anniversary of the enactment of Medicare and Medicaid into law. Since July 30, 1965, when Lyndon Johnson signed the bill creating these fundamental health initiatives, these two programs have evolved together to reliably meet the demands of aging and medically vulnerable Americans who may not have had access to medical attention otherwise. Medicare and Medicaid currently provide a lifeline to over 100 million Americans.

In my district, I can attest that Medicare and Medicaid serve as an indispensable safety net for many constituents. The Seventh Congressional District of Illinois includes some of the most medically underserved communities in America. Census data show that 24 percent of families and 44 percent of children under 18 live below the poverty line. In fact, some communities on Chicago's west side experience infant mortality rates comparable with third-world countries. In the State of Illinois, 14 percent of all residents are enrolled in Medicare and 19 percent in Medicaid.

Clearly these government health programs provide vital health care coverage to Illinoisians when almost one-fifth of the State is covered by Medicaid and one-sixth by Medicare. Indeed, Illinois' mothers and children are the biggest beneficiaries of Medicaid. This Federal program finances 40 percent of total births in Illinois and helps ensure that over 1 million children in Illinois receive access to affordable health care.

It is this commitment to our citizens that drives Congress to work actively for comprehensive health reform. We must provide a public option within that reform. Further, we must continue to support and expand community health centers as outstanding deliverers of primary care. These providers are proven to reap solid benefits to our patients, communities, and State and local governments in terms of efficiency. For example, Medicaid beneficiaries relying on health centers for usual care were 19 percent less likely to use the emergency department than Medicaid beneficiaries using outpatient and office-based physicians for usual care. Overall, health centers save the health care system between \$9.9 billion and \$17.6 billion annually, a figure that will grow.

I acknowledge the tremendous step that Lyndon B. Johnson took 44 years ago when he signed the Medicare and Medicaid bills into law as titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act. We must continue to make use of these programs because they have served us well and will continue to do so.