

*Austin residents and seniors will benefit under House plan to reform health care*

**Austin, MN** – Today, Congressman Tim Walz was joined at the Austin Senior Center by seniors, doctors and Austin residents who believe the consumer protections in HR 3962, the Affordable Healthcare for American Act will put individuals and families back in charge of their health and provide the kind of change we desperately need to see in the health care industry. Tammy Krizter, Vice President of the Austin Medical Center, Heidi Holste of the Minnesota AARP chapter, public health officials, and local Austin residents joined Walz in support of the bill.

“The bill we passed is a victory for Minnesota families who will finally have stable, affordable coverage they can count on,” Walz said. “Parents will not only have more affordable and better quality coverage for their kids, but thanks to these reforms, they’ll now be able to help their children get a start in the world by keeping them on the family insurance plan as long as their 27th birthday. In this economy, that’s a big deal for a young person who is fighting for their first job or to pay for college.”

“In addition, this bill stops unfair discrimination against people with pre-existing conditions like Michelle and it expands and improves Medicare coverage by eliminating co-pays for preventative care and closing the donut hole.” continued Walz.

"AARP endorsed the Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962) because it makes prescription drugs more affordable for seniors by closing the dangerous gap in Medicare drug coverage and allowing the program to negotiate lower drug prices," said AARP State Director Michele Kimball. "It adds cost-free preventive services like cancer screenings and cracks down on waste and fraud to protect and strengthen traditional Medicare benefits. In addition, the legislation provides benefits to help seniors and people with disabilities live in their own homes and communities by establishing the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) program."

Kimball added, "For all Americans-especially those age 50 to 64 who often struggle to find affordable insurance-this plan strictly limits how much more insurance companies can charge based on age, and stops insurers from denying coverage based on a person's health history or gender. For those who still cannot find affordable coverage on their own, this bill offers help so they can purchase insurance. We thank Congressman Walz for his vote in favor of this bill and look forward to working with the entire Minnesota Congressional Delegation to see health care reform enacted into law."

Austin resident and breast cancer survivor Michelle Fimon said, "I feel more vulnerable than ever now that I have battled breast cancer. I must have health care insurance but fear that insurance companies will deny me coverage. Right now my only option is to remain in low paying jobs to keep my eligibility for medical assistance."

Walz concluded, "We want people like Michelle to be able to seek economic opportunities and to better their situation, but our current health care system traps them in a no-win situation. We can do better and I believe the legislation we've passed will allow Michelle to pursue those opportunities without fear."

HR 3962, the Affordable Healthcare for American Act passed the House of Representatives in November. Health insurance reform legislation is currently pending in the U.S. Senate.

-30-