

Costly program

Understandably, health care has moved front and center in the campaigns for president and Indiana governor. Times are tough, and many Americans are worried about the rising cost of health care and the soaring costs of prescription drugs.

As U.S. Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) said to me in a meeting this week, "the rising cost of health care may be the single biggest long-term problem this country faces over the next 10 years. If we don't get this under control, it could have devastating consequences for individual families and devastating consequences for our national economy."

Something must be done. However, as you consider the health-care proposals of competing candidates in the final days of this election season, I would ask every voter to remember the phrase "buyer beware." Both Sen. Kerry and Gov. Kernan make promises that sound good on paper but don't quite work in practice.

Kerry is proposing a major overhaul of the American health-care system. He describes his plan as voluntary, claiming it would result in significantly improved health coverage for many Americans without a major tax hike.

Unfortunately, the numbers supporting r Kerry's \$1.5 trillion plan do not add up. Industry experts say the Kerry health plan will actually raise taxes an average of \$969 per year per family and will vastly expand the role of government in your health-care decisions.

Of the 25 million Americans insured under the Kerry health plan, almost 22 million will be in the Medicaid program — a government-controlled health-care program. Worse yet, Frist estimates that the Kerry plan would actually result in about eight million Americans losing their private insurance coverage and ending up on Medicaid.

In the long run, this big government expansion would be disastrous for the quality of health care in our country. Just ask any physician or any hospital what happens when a patient with Medicaid coverage is treated. Prices are strictly controlled, and, ultimately, there is rationing — all of which together destroys innovation, research and development. That is the wrong prescription for our country.

In the Indiana Governor's campaign, Gov. Kernan brought health care into the race by attacking Mitch Daniels for his decade of service working at Eli Lilly. In conjunction with these attacks, Kernan has promised to reduce the cost of prescription drugs by re-importing drugs from Canada.



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Lowering the cost of prescription drugs is a worthy goal. However, the problem with Kernan's plan is that it could lead to seniors getting financially duped or, worse yet, physically hurt because of problems with unregulated drugs re-imported from Canada.

Last month, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration intercepted 439 prescription drug packages purportedly sent from Canada to Americans. Upon examination, custom agents in Miami said none of the drugs appeared to have been made in Canada. In fact, they actually came from Singapore and Japan. Worse yet, according to the FDA, many of the drugs had unstated dosages and suspicious labels. Fully half of the intercepted drugs had generic equivalents for sale cheaper here in America.

This week, Daniels unveiled a plan that will help Hoosiers save millions on the cost of medications. Daniels traveled to an Evansville doctor's office to highlight a website designed to help customers find low cost prescription drugs.

The website, modeled after state government sites utilized in Idaho and Ohio, allows people to access low-cost prescription drug programs by simply inputting some basic information on a computer. The system uses that information to search quickly for the best prescription drug discount programs for their medication and provides the application form for the program.

For folks who don't have a computer, a toll free phone number could be created to access the program.

This program works. For example, by utilizing the website, a married Hoosier making \$24,000 a year or less can obtain the popular cholesterol-lowering medication Zocor for no cost, and it is delivered directly from the company to the person's front door. A one-month supply of Zocor costs, on average, \$130 at the pharmacy.

As Daniels has stated, this system will allow Hoosiers to find prescription medications at savings of up to hundreds of dollars a month. It's safe, it's secure, and these medications can be delivered to your doctor's office, pharmacy or right to your front door.

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