

Laws and Sausages

By John Crabtree, The Center for Rural Affairs

It's an old joke - laws and sausages are two things no one should ever see made. The health care debate has given Americans a view of Congress that is roughly the equivalent of an all-access pass to an Oscar Meyer hot dog factory. Unprincipled partisanship, capitulation to the health insurance industry, political expediency and inside baseball have left most Americans as disillusioned with the legislative process as they are frustrated with the dysfunction of their health care system.

After all the posturing and political rhetoric it seems necessary to remember why we have labored so diligently to reform health care. The answer is simple; allowing current health insurance and cost-shifting trends to continue, unchecked by reform, will severely impact people across America, rural Americans in particular.

Soon to be released Center for Rural Affairs research reveals that by 2019 approximately one in four rural Americans will be uninsured. In rural communities with fewer than 2,500 residents, absent reform, the uninsured will number nearly one in three. Shifting costs from the uninsured to those with insurance will more than double, costing the average household, conservatively, \$1,206 annually. And the average rural household will absorb nearly \$4,700 of their own health care costs annually as well, compared to \$2,785 currently.

America needs health care reform, rural America's family farmers, ranchers, main street businesses and rural communities need it more than most. The debate has been long and tiresome. The time to make health care more affordable and accessible for all Americans has arrived.

The Center for Rural Affairs was established in 1973 as an unaffiliated nonprofit corporation under IRS code 501(c)3. The Center for Rural Affairs was formed by rural Nebraskans concerned about family farms and rural communities, and we work to strengthen small businesses, family farms and ranches, and rural communities.