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Rural America's top ten issues in health care reform debate

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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While the Obama administration conducted a health care listening session in Des Moines, Iowa this week, the third in a series of five listening sessions across the nation, the Center for Rural Affairs released a report detailing the top ten rural health care issues in the ongoing debate over health care reform.

“There are numerous unique health care issues facing rural people and rural places. This is surely not an exhaustive list of those issues. But it is our view of the top ten rural issues that should be addressed in health care reform legislation,” said Jon Bailey, Director of Rural Research and Analysis at the Center for Rural Affairs.

According to Bailey, the Center hopes that their top ten list can serve as a checklist against which any legislative proposal for reform can be measured to determine its value and effectiveness for rural America.

The Center's report identifies the following issues as crucial rural elements in the health care reform debate:

- An economy based on self-employment and small business
- Greater dependence on and need for public health insurance plans
- A stressed health care delivery system
- Health care provider and workforce shortages
- An aging rural population
- A sicker, more at-risk population
- The need for preventive care, health and wellness resources
- Lack of mental health services
- Increasing dependence on technology
- Effective emergency medical services

“Since 1969, the number of self-employed workers in rural areas has grown by over 240 percent. With an economy dominated by small businesses and self-employment, rural people are generally less insured, more underinsured and more dependent on the individual insurance market,” Bailey added. “That fact and the other issues delineated

here make it paramount that Congress and the White House get health care reform right for all Americans, urban and rural.”

The Center for Rural Affairs’ release of the report on the same day as one of President Obama’s Health Care Listening Sessions is not coincidental. Steph Larsen, Policy Organizer for the Center, attended the health care listening session in Des Moines where she shared the Center’s report with administration officials.

“Rural America faces the same health care issues as urban America – skyrocketing costs, too many uninsured and underinsured, and a health care delivery system strained to the point of breaking. There are, however, numerous unique rural health care challenges. Which is why we will be presenting this report to the administration today,” Larsen said.

The full report is available online at: <http://files.cfra.org/pdf/Ten-Rural-Issues-for-Health-Care-Reform.pdf>

Additional reports exploring a variety of rural health care issues – including policy issues, and how congressional reform proposals address rural health care, will be released in the coming weeks. As they are released, these papers can be found at the Rural Health Care Reform section of the Center for Rural Affairs’ website, www.cfra.org/policy/health-care

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