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## Pence Brings Health Care Talk Home

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- Throughout the month of August, members of the United States Congress will be back home. But many of them won't be using the time to relax or vacation.

Most of them, like U.S. Congressman Mike Pence (R-District 6), are utilizing the month to hear from constituents and visit their districts to hear from the citizenry.

Pence sojourned into the Greensburg Community Learning Center on Wednesday morning, meeting a group of more than 100 people for a town hall meeting.

Several topics were on the minds of the Decatur County residents who showed up, but one that came up again and again was health care reform. Pence said that health care reform was important, but noted that there were other issues that seemed more pressing.

"I think job one in Washington D.C. today should be jobs," Pence said.

He added that he believed President Barack Obama's stimulus bill that was passed in February was simply not working by any standard. The majority of the stimulus, Pence continued, depended upon piecemeal spending on long-standing government programs. He said that there had to be some correlation between a 7.5 percent unemployment then and the 9.5 percent unemployment rate now. Pence encouraged fiscal discipline and the need to recognize what isn't working. The piecemeal approach, utilizing spending and hand-outs, wouldn't work, Pence explained. He added he believed that the American people know borrowing and spending money cannot fix the economy.

"Many of us saw it as a national energy tax," Pence said about the recent "cap-and-trade" legislation. An increase in costs in creating energy using carbon-based sources was not the right way to go, and Pence said that he strongly opposed the legislation.

"We should be pursuing energy independence with an all-of-the-above strategy," he said.

That would include nuclear, solar and wind power. Pence noted that the United States has not even attempted to build a nuclear power plant since 1978. "And more people deserve more access to American oil. That has to be part of the equation," Pence said.

Pence knew that one of the biggest issues currently dividing the country was health care.

"I think inaction is not an option on health care reform," he explained.

Consistently, Pence is hearing about the rising costs of health insurance and health care, but the answer is not a government run insurance option, he said. According to him, President Obama's plan could cause millions of Americans to lose their health insurance, due to the fact that in a tough economy, as soon as the government is offering free health insurance, most employers would be able to cancel their insurance, forcing the employees to seek out the government assistance. Pence added that a government option that competes with private sector insurance could lead to socialized medicine.

Though he disagrees with the current White House plans, Pence did provide alternatives. He

said he wanted everyone to have access to the same health insurance that the members of Congress have, which garnered him significant applause. He suggested association health plans, like farm plans or restaurant plans.

"The numbers, then, work," Pence said.

The association health plans, Pence warned, were not supported by the big insurance companies, but the idea was a powerful one.

In his meetings with doctors, Pence said he learned that medical malpractice claims are also working to drive up health care costs. Doctors often have to practice "defensive medicine," Pence explained. For example, that means a doctor will ask a patient to undergo three tests instead of just one, to make sure that the doctor is better covered under his or her insurance.

"We must get medical malpractice under control," Pence said.

He added that responsible malpractice reform must be part of any successful health care reform plan.

Questions from the crowd often focused on health care reform. Residents expressed concern regarding the home visitation program that is part of the bill.

"That's not exactly what I need from my government," Pence said. "I just don't want the government in that conversation."

Family is the most essential bit of government in society, he added.

So called "end of life issues" that Pence said were mentioned in the bill also brought up

concerns.

"I don't want a government official determining what kind of treatment my loved ones get," Pence said.

Government is about scarce resources, and the current plans are a slippery slope to rationing, he added.

When asked about Medicaid and Medicare, Pence responded that both of the programs were growing broke. Senator Richard Lugar had told the United States Senate recently that health care reform should be delayed while the government works to get the economy back on track, Pence said.

Several questions from the audience focused on lobbying in Washington D.C. Pence said that lobbying can be an honorable profession, but confessed that the noise they make in the public debate can be frustrating. Pence explained that he had supported a number of bills recently supporting the concept of getting lobbying under control. He added that the "earmarking" system does not hold politicians accountable, and Pence had therefore decided not to pursue earmarks for his district to lead the charge.

Getting the average American involved in government was an issue that was raised at the town hall meeting.

"There is no force in Washington D.C. like the voice of the American people. Congress moves when the American people speak in one voice," Pence said.

Giant deficits, bailouts and government take-overs are not what the country is about, Pence went on.

"The government can never give you anything that they didn't take from another American."

He encouraged citizens to never doubt that a letter, e-mail or message is important to a government representative.

"It's making a difference now across this country," he said.

Regarding Tuesday's massive rain storm that flooded streets and roads, Pence said that his team was working with the district closely, functioning with city administrations to address any help that may be necessary.

"This mayor has already been in my face about it," Pence said with a smile about Mayor Gary Herbert.

Finally, Pence shared a personal story about his daughter, who at the time was 10 years old. Running into a pharmacy to purchase a diet soda, Pence arrived at the counter only to find out he had forgotten to bring money. Reacting quickly, he asked his daughter for the money, who gave it up after a brief quibble. He took the card and swiped it, and later said he felt about an inch tall, and his wife was not happy about it when he arrived home.

"It occurred to me that this is what we're doing in Washington D.C.," Pence said.

Before departing to meet with county and city residents who wanted to speak face to face, Pence stressed that fiscal discipline and broad-based tax relief must be cornerstones to reverse the troubled economy.

"It's imperative we come together to get this economy moving," Pence said.