

Date: 7/28/2009 . <http://lugar.senate.gov>

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## **Lugar says ailing economy is the wrong time for costly health care remedies**

A majority of the Members of Congress share President Obama's humane goal that millions more Americans might enjoy health insurance coverage and that medical care to all Americans might be substantially improved. For the moment, however, President Obama and the Congress must recognize that the overwhelming demand of most Americans is that presidential and congressional leadership should focus each day on restoration of jobs, strengthening of housing opportunities, new growth in small business and large industries, and banks that are not only solvent but confident of normal lending. In essence, the task facing national leadership is truly monumental. A national and international recession has not ended and many economists predict that unemployment in the United States will grow in coming months.

The President and the current Congress have come into office in the midst of a fiscal year that has already suffered a budget deficit of \$1.086 trillion with a final deficit for fiscal 2009 predicted around \$1.8 trillion. The appropriation bills that the Congress is considering, and that will make up the next fiscal year's expenditures, are predicted to result in another annual deficit of more than \$1 trillion. In the first nine months of this fiscal year, Medicaid spending has increased by 23 percent to \$186 billion. Spending on food stamps has increased 36.8 percent to \$40 billion. Unemployment benefits have increased 165 percent to \$77 billion. The current budget deficit can be equated at \$8,500 per American family with similar spending projected ahead for the coming year.

Republicans and Democrats may feel that passing comprehensive health legislation before the summer recess or adjournment in the fall is crucial to the success or failure of the Obama administration and/or party leadership in the Congress.

But I would suggest that successful leadership will be defined, now and historically, by success in bringing a horrendous economic recession to an end, bringing new strength to our economy, and providing vital leadership in international relations as we hope to bring conflicts under control and in some cases, to conclusion.

I appreciate that President Obama has strongly argued that comprehensive health care legislation is an important component to reducing federal deficit spending. He has contended that failure to pass this legislation will increase deficits now and for many years to come. I disagree with the President.

After the economic recession in our country comes to a conclusion, a high priority may be extension of health insurance coverage and reform of many health care practices. When such changes occur, they are likely to be expensive and Americans will need to debate, even then, their priority in comparison to many other national goals. One reason why health care is likely to remain expensive is that major advances in surgical procedures, prescription drugs, and other health care practices have prolonged the lives of tens of millions of Americans and improved the quality of those additional years. The Washington Post, in a front-page story on July 26, 2009, mentioned that "the fight against heart disease has been slow and incremental. It's also been extremely expensive and wildly

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successful." Americans should not take for granted all of the advances in health care that have enriched our lives, but we sometimes forget that we require and even pray for much more medical progress in years to come, which is likely to be expensive.

After the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office reported that current legislative proposals might increase health costs by more than \$1 trillion during the next ten years, several Members of Congress have suggested new forms of taxation, reduction of payments to doctors and hospitals, and curtailment of certain types of insurance coverage. These and other suggestions may temporarily bring about cost reduction but will also have some after-effects in the overall economy. In fact, strong financial incentives may be needed to enlist men and women to enter the medical field. Failure to enlist a sufficient number of doctors could lead to rationing of service and longer lines to find someone who will give humane attention.

In the meanwhile, it is possible that the President and Members of Congress might find some inexpensive, incremental improvements that could result in a greater number of Americans being served through health insurance and more efficiently operating health care institutions. The strong desire that most of us have to continue discussing these issues and make improvements need not be postponed even as President Obama and the Congress strive for victory over a devastating national economic recession.

Because our federal spending deficits have risen so much and are predicted to rise even more, all substantive discussions on health care and other important issues will be conducted during many years of planning and, finally, decisive action to reduce deficit spending and preserve the value and integrity of the dollar as we continue to borrow hundreds of billions of dollars in the form of U.S. Treasury Bonds sold to governments and citizens of other countries. They, too, are counting on the integrity of our dollar and our financial system to preserve the value of their financial reserves.

Starting with President Obama and extending to all Members of Congress, we wish that we had inherited a neutral, peaceful playing field. We have not been so fortunate. Our responsibility now is to recognize the extraordinary financial tragedy that has befallen our country and to recognize the unprecedented opportunity that we have to stop the momentum of that tragedy. We must provide valid hope of constructive vision, idealism, and change in the future. I look forward to working with the President and my colleagues to tackle first things first.

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Regarding the cap and trade bill, Senator Lugar said the following, "I'd not be able to support that legislation. Trying to describe the changes would need a catalogue..It is an extraordinarily expensive bill at a time when our budget situation, the deficits we are running, is already threatening potential inflation."

Thank you, again, for contacting Senator Lugar's office.

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