

SENATOR CHRISTINE KAUFMANN
HELENA



August 20, 2015

The Big Sky Country

Secretary Sylvia Burwell
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

HELENA ADDRESS:
PO BOX 200500
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-0500
(406) 444-4800

HOME ADDRESS:
PO BOX 1566
HELENA, MONTANA 59624-1566
(406) 439-0256
kaufmann@mt.net
www.ckaufmann.com

Dear Secretary Burwell,

We are a group of Democratic legislators from Montana writing to urge CMS to approve Montana's Medicaid Waiver. We acknowledge the HELP Act, and the waiver based on its provisions, are imperfect. We supported the legislation, first and foremost, because 70,000 Montanans cannot wait for the political climate to be more favorable. They need access to health care now.

We all supported earlier legislation that expanded Medicaid in a manner more acceptable to us—without premiums and co-pays, without fees, or workforce assessments. We worked with the executive branch and advocacy groups to build public support, garner favorable press attention, and prepare strong public testimony.

It did not matter. We were dealing with entrenched ideology among the Republican majorities in both houses. After 6.5 hours of compelling testimony from patients, medical professionals, veterans, chambers of commerce, rural hospitals, and safety net providers, the committee's Republican majority immediately voted down the bill without serious deliberation...in the face of dying constituents.

We supported the negotiated compromise—the HELP Act—because we believed it achieved all the policy advances we could hope for, given the political reality. We made full use of existing rules to leverage support from moderate Republicans. As a result, and by the slimmest of margins, Montana became the first state in 18 months to expand Medicaid legislatively. As a result, 70,000 more Montanans will have access to health care, our local hospitals will get a boost that just might help them remain financially viable, and we will create thousands of good paying jobs across our state.

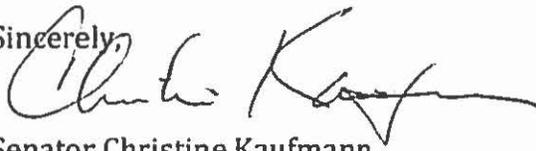
Many of us have worked extensively on health care reform over the years and will continue to do so. The HELP Act, by far, represents our biggest policy victory in terms of access. In the future, with a more favorable political climate, we will be able to make changes to the law that makes care more affordable and universal. If the current opportunity is lost, expansion of health care access is lost to Montana for the foreseeable future. It may well be lost in all the remaining non-expansion states. Our reasonable colleagues in the majority

party will have drawn the wrath of their leadership, and likely primary challengers, for nothing.

We understand the waiver needs to be negotiated and refined. We understand the need for CMS to set standards. We examined waivers approved in other states and worked with the executive to convince our colleagues to make substantial changes. We know that some provisions will limit affordable options for some of our constituents. We deeply regret that and will work to make changes in the future. However, tens of thousands of our constituents will have new access to healthcare when this waiver is approved and this policy is implemented. This is access that these Montanans would be denied if it were not for the tough, creative, and significant compromises we made in order to get this done. This policy will work and we are ready to get started with implementation.

We expect the Obama administration to help us get to a final approved waiver in a timely way. In Montana the federal government is not popular. Republicans are more than happy to exploit and feed anti-government hatred in the election cycle. Please don't give them opportunity to link Democrats with the failure of Medicaid expansion in Montana.

Sincerely,



Senator Christine Kaufmann

Senator Mary Caferro

Senator Jon Sesso

Senator Robyn Driscoll

Senator Tom Facey

Senator Lea Whitford

Senator Diane Sands

Senator Sue Malek

Senator Sharon Stewart Peregoy

Senator Jill Cohenour

Senator Jonathan Windy Boy

Senator Cynthia Wolken

Senator Mary McNally

Senator Mary Sheehy Moe

Senator Dick Barrett

Senator Mike Phillips

Senator Cliff Larson

Senator Gene Vuckovich

Senator Jim Keane

Senator Brad Hamlett

Senator JP Pomnichowski

Representative Pat Noonan

Representative Jenny Eck

Representative Margie MacDonald

Representative Bryce Bennett

Representative Bridget Smith

Representative Carolyn Pease Lopez

Representative Virginia Court

Representative Jean Price

Representative Kelly McCarthy

Representative Tom Woods

Representative Chris Pope

Representative Zach Brown

Representative Mary Ann Dunwell

Representative Jessica Karjala

Representative Kimberly Dudik

Representative Ellie Hill

Representative Janet Ellis

Representative Nancy Wilson

Representative Moffie Funk

Representative Denise Hayman

Representative Nate McConnell

Representative Bob Melhoff

Representative Tom Jacobson

Representative Gordon Pierson

Representative Zac Perry

Representative Willis Curdy