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Hundreds line up for health care town hall meeting in Columbia

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COLUMBIA, SC (WIS) - The health care debate is beginning to stir in South Carolina with several town hall meetings scheduled around the state.

In Columbia, Rep. Joe Wilson held a town hall meeting at Keenan High School. It was one of four planned meetings scheduled throughout Wilson's Second Congressional District.

Stephanie McPherson-O'Neal was at that town hall meeting. She's one of the millions of uninsured Americans who's had to make some tough decisions.

"I had to choose losing my house or insuring us," said Stephanie.

In order to keep the house, Stephanie could only afford to insure herself paying out of pocket for COBRA health coverage at \$480 a month. It was a tough choice considering she's got a daughter as well.

Lochlan, her daughter, was left uninsured, leaving the mother and daughter with the same opinion of our health care system.

"It needs to be overhauled, something needs to happen," said Stephanie.

Something is indeed happening as multiple health care reform bills make their way through Congress. Two bills have been in the spotlight in the past few months: the House of Representatives' bill, which would create a "public option" of government health care and a bipartisan bill in the Senate which makes the use of cooperatives instead of the public option in order to keep the government out of health care.

Politicians around the country seem to have a different opinion about the way health care reform should be achieved.

Sen. Jim DeMint has been a leader in the opposition against the Democrats' plans. DeMint held his own town hall meeting down in the Lowcountry Monday afternoon to discuss his own reform efforts and the ones being debated in Congress.

DeMint's town hall was to a mostly-friendly crowd of over 300; that's in stark contrast to the many heated meetings seen across the nation in the past several weeks.

"It makes no sense to rush when they're talking about it not taking effect until 2013. What they're trying to do is take advantage of a crisis that to a large degree they have manufactured. We've got millions of Americans without health insurance that we need to get insured. We don't need to be cutting Medicare or taking private insurance away from people who are happy. What we need to do is fix what's broken," said Sen. DeMint.

DeMint's solution includes a mix of vouchers, tort reform and more competition.

His approach has also drawn fire from the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce.

"Everybody out there says competition, that's what's really going to drive down rates. We have got wide open competition in this country and in south Carolina. There are literally hundreds and hundreds of insurance carriers that you can go to, to get your health insurance from. Wide open competition. How's that working? We have double-digit increases in premiums every year," said Frank Knapp from the organization.

Meanwhile, back in Columbia, Stephanie was pleased to see so many people show up for the meeting. However, She feels the Republican Wilson lost the crowd's focus by being too partisan.

"I think that they need to work on a more bipartisan language and I think that would have got more people listening," said Stephanie.

But the opportunity to listen to a discussion of health care is an encouraging sign to Stephanie and her daughter.

"I'm glad that everybody in the country seems to be willing to take a look at it now where they weren't willing before," said Stephanie.

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