

## (August 19, 2006) Affordable Care

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE (LETTER)

AFFORDABLE CARE

U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski, (D-III)

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/chi-0608190257aug19,1,4324050.story>

August 19, 2006

Tribune staff reporter Judith Graham's article regarding the lack of hospital price information available to the public was both timely and informative.

I became personally aware of the confusion surrounding hospital pricing after I received the bill for a brief hospital stay for a broken hip in 2004.

This experience, which included \$6 charges for half-ounce packs of antibiotic ointment, led me to study the issue in more detail and then introduce a bill last year that would compel hospitals to disclose prices.

The Hospital Price Reporting and Disclosure Act would require hospitals to report twice a year to the secretary of health and human services the price they bill for the 25 most commonly performed in-patient procedures, the 25 most common outpatient procedures and the 50 most-used medications.

HHS would then be required to report these prices on a user-friendly Web site available to the public.

This is the first step in giving Americans the information that they commonly expect for any other service.

While price should never be the sole criterion for determining health-care choices, it is information we should expect to have.

The Tribune articles focused on the prices negotiated with insurance companies, and while these are certainly important, the more than 47 million uninsured individuals are the ones who most need price information.

Knowing the charges each hospital bills would help the uninsured as they try to most efficiently provide health care for their families (although affordable insurance coverage is the most important remedy needed).

It is good to see that there has been a little movement on this issue by a few insurance companies and that some states have gotten involved, but much more needs to be done and it is clear that action by the federal government is the only way it will happen.

I have continued to work on this issue in Congress in a bipartisan manner for the past year-and-a-half.

Unfortunately attempts to pass a law requiring price disclosure have been thwarted by powerful lobbying by some hospitals.

Hospital price disclosure is not the silver bullet that will solve completely the problem of access to affordable health care.

And determining exactly what prices should be disclosed and how to do that is not simple.

But why should we expect more information from an auto repair shop than from our health-care providers?

It is simply a matter of fairness for consumers. It is time for everyone involved to come together and find a solution that will provide a step forward for families who need to find affordable health care.