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Congressman Alexander wants 'improvement' -- not 'reform' -- of health care

By Stephen Largen
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MONROE U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, said the United States has the best health-care system that the world has to offer, and he opposes any major reform of the existing system.

"I don't like the public option at all," Alexander said Tuesday, Aug. 4, in an interview with The News-Star of Monroe.

"I think it's going to slow down anyway because the public is going to demand that. I think that we need to improve the existing health care. I don't like the word 'reform'; I like 'improvement' of health care.

In the most recent World Health Organization health-care survey published in 2000, the U.S. is ranked 37th in overall performance and 72nd in overall level of health of the 191 nations included in the study. Most estimates say at least 40 million Americans do not have health insurance.

Alexander said any tax increases that could follow reform are a significant sticking point for him.

According to a Louisiana Health Insurance Survey, which is conducted by the Louisiana State University Public Policy Research Lab, there were 575,011 uninsured adults and 62,329 uninsured children under age 19 statewide in the fourth quarter.

There are things that we can do," he said.

"I've got a bill that would give a tax credit to people that pay your health insurance premiums. Right now, we have a bill lying before us that says to an employer, 'If you don't provide your employees with health insurance, we're going to punish you by raising payroll taxes, and tell the employee if you don't participate in this health-care plan, we're going to punish you by raising your taxes.

"We ought to do the opposite. We ought to say, 'Hey, if you'll provide this insurance, we'll give you a credit for the amount that it takes to buy that insurance and that would lessen the burden on the taxpayers at some point. And long-term care insurance, I think we ought to give a tax credit there.

Alexander added that a key to improving health care in Louisiana is to make sure more students going into health-care fields work in high-need areas.

One way to do that, Alexander said, is by allowing more Louisianians into the state s medical schools and admitting fewer foreign-born students who are studying here but intend to leave the country following graduation.

They are occupying a seat that could be held by a young man or a woman in Louisiana that would like to serve in an underserved area, Alexander said.

But they re being denied that right to that classroom because it s already at capacity. But some of those seats are being held by students from foreign countries who have intentions of going back to those countries. And I don t think we ought to be doing that.

Alexander is back in the 5th Congressional District after leaving Washington, D.C., for the August recess.

Before returning home, Alexander introduced legislation last week stating that the federal government should not levy additional taxes on guns and ammunition in the midst of the recession. Gun sales have been swelling in many parts of the country since President Obama was elected amid fears that the government would further tax and regulate gun sales.

There are several in Washington, especially since the Obama administration has taken over, that are using the increasing taxes on ammunition and the sale of guns as a method of discouraging people to participate or exercise their freedom under the Second Amendment, Alexander said.

And the intent of my legislation is just to express the will of Congress that that not happen. You know, I don t know how far it will go. I know that there s not a likelihood that we ll have federal agents coming to your home right now and saying, We want your gun.

But I do know that it would be discouraging for one to own a gun if they can t afford ammunition for it or if they find all of a sudden that somebody has passed a law that said you can have a gun in your home but you can t go anywhere with a gun. You know I believe the Second Amendment is extremely important to us and anything that we can do to send a signal to those that would like to strip Second Amendment rights, then we ll do that.

Alexander also recently introduced another piece of legislation that would strip federal funding for abortions in the health-care reform bill.

I read the health-care bill, No. 1, and it s about a thousand pages long, he said.

There are provisions in there that would lead one to believe that at some point there are going to be taxpayer monies used to fund abortions.

The bill does not contain language outlawing the use of federal money on abortions in cases of rape and incest, Alexander said.

If it gets down to that point, we ll be glad to negotiate and talk with them and talk about it.

But the bill does not contain that.

Alexander said President Obama is a good person with bad ideas about what we need to do as a nation.

Asked to grade Obama s performance thus far, Alexander said he would give a B for performance and a D for policy positions.

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