



U.S. Congressman  
**Nick Rahall**  
*WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MARCH 16, 1992**

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**RAHALL WELCOMES SECRETARY OF HEALTH SULLIVAN TO LINCOLN  
-- PUSHES FOR CONGRESS TO EXTEND COBRA BENEFITS FOR 60 MONTHS --**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today welcomed Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan to southern West Virginia, as he prepares to tour the Lincoln Primary Care Center in Hamlin on March 18.

Rahall, who visited the Lincoln County Clinic in February, praised the clinic for its outstanding work. But Rahall had far less praise for the health care situation in America.

In 1989 the United States spent \$3,354 per capita on health care, "and yet we have people in our small rural hamlets that have to drive hours just to see the nearest doctor," said Rahall.

Rahall added that he has backed legislation that would try to provide some relief to those who are at the end of their health care rope because of the recession. The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) of 1985 allowed former employees to continue to purchase their former health plan for 18 to 36 months after their employment ended. Recent legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Dan Glickman (D-KS) would extend that coverage to 60 months.

"With the recession still lingering and more and more people out of work, we need to protect those who are in danger of losing their health care. This legislation would provide that breathing room," said Rahall.

Rahall added that at some time over a two year period more than 60 million Americans will be uninsured and that no family can be confident that they are not one job loss or illness away from being uninsured.

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DAN GLICKMAN  
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Dear Colleague:

~~The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA), requires employers to allow former employees to continue to purchase their health benefits under their former plan for 18 to 36 months after the end of their employment. The former employee pays the full cost of the coverage, including a 2% fee to cover the employer's administrative costs.~~

Recently, I hosted a Town Hall Meeting addressing health care. Several of my constituents mentioned that because of the current economic problems it has become difficult to secure a replacement job, and soon their option to purchase health benefits under COBRA would expire. I do not believe it is right for these people to be both jobless and unprotected in the event they need medical benefits.

~~With this in mind, I have introduced legislation to extend COBRA coverage to 60 months. My bill also eliminates the distinction of coverage based on how the employee-employer relationship was terminated. Presently, if an employee quits, he is entitled to twice the period of coverage that a laid-off employee may receive. That makes no sense.~~

The intent of Congress enacting the continuation of health benefits provision in COBRA was to ensure no American went without health coverage while between jobs. The strong economy at that time caused Congress to believe 18 months would be sufficient for a terminated employee to find new work. But the current tough economic times are keeping a greater number of people unemployed for longer than 18 months. Since Congress has extended unemployment benefits, and may do so again in the coming weeks, we also should extend the amount of time former employees may hold onto health coverage while unemployed.

This bill is a small, but important first step in helping our constituents survive these tough economic times, and will provide the security of continued health insurance to those who do not have the security of a job. I urge you to contact me, or Eric Sildon on my staff (5-6216) to cosponsor this legislation.

With best regards,

*Dan Glickman*

Dan Glickman

MEMBER OF CONGRESS