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Clyburn pushes medical reform

U.S. representative in Columbia to gather support for House health-care plan

By LEROY CHAPMAN JR. - lchapman@thestate.com

U.S. House Majority Whip James Clyburn on Monday pushed health-care reform and rebutted critics who argue the plan initiated by President Barack Obama is being rushed through Congress without being properly vetted.

Obama has said he wants to sign a bill in October that would reduce medical costs and provide coverage to nearly 50 million uninsured Americans. Clyburn, a Columbia Democrat, will be critical to mustering the votes needed to get a bill to the president over the next three months.

Clyburn says reforms are needed to:

- Close the so-called doughnut holes, such as the one that has Medicare recipients paying hundreds of dollars out of pocket for prescriptions when their benefits run out in a calendar year
- Give insurance options to those who are already sick. Health insurers generally don't cover those with pre-existing illnesses.
- Make private health-care coverage stretch further. The out-of-pocket expenses for policyholders have grown while the insurers have narrowed their responsibilities, he said.

"We've been kicking the can down the road for 57 years," Clyburn said of the federal government's efforts to provide health care safety nets for all citizens. Now, he said,

is the time to act as health insurance has become less affordable for businesses to offer and less available to working families.

At a town hall meeting at the Drew Wellness Center in Columbia, about 100 people heard tale after tale from local residents of how the system is failing them.

A woman who uses a wheelchair said she frequents the emergency room because she has to stretch her Medicare prescriptions and doesn't get full doses of her drugs.

A woman who had been hit by a drunk driver and suffered permanent injury said her health insurance company canceled the coverage for which she had been paying \$1,000 a month soon after her accident. Now she is paying for her care out of pocket.

A breast cancer survivor who said her health insurance takes up 30 percent of her income said she cannot afford a policy for the staff at her small business because she increases the risk for all.

Clyburn said he has met with each hospital in his district and with S.C. insurance providers. Clyburn said he hopes by meeting with everyone who has a stake in health-care reform he can get all sides to look past their own interests.

"Everyone has an idea about how this should not be done," Clyburn said.

While Clyburn is busy pushing reform, South Carolina Republicans are urging caution.

"A government-controlled system would limit choice and quality by letting politicians and bureaucrats determine your level of care in order to bring down costs," said U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-Lexington, on his campaign blog. "That is unnecessary and unacceptable."

Reach Chapman at (803) 771-8387.

