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A Vigorous Approach to Health



by Livvy R. Floren

Healthcare- affordability, adequacy and access- will be a major legislative priority when the General Assembly convenes on January Third.

Rep. Lile Gibbons, Rep. Dolly Powers and I- the Greenwich delegation in the House of Representatives- believe the role of government is to help individuals who are unable to help themselves. We are committed to increasing access to quality healthcare for all Connecticut citizens.

The keystone of our initiative is a proposal to provide health insurance to all children in low-income families. Currently, a large percentage of low-income children in Connecticut are covered through the State's HUSKY insurance program. However, the program could be improved by enhanced dental services and a premium assistance program. We also recommend expanding Connecticut's childhood immunization program to include pertussis (whooping cough) and meningococcal conjugate vaccines for adolescents.

We believe in portable and flexible insurance plans which are consumer-friendly. Allow employees to offer the health insurance coverage their employees really want and need. Rather than imposing a "one size fits all" health insurance mandate on Connecticut businesses, employers should have options for covering younger adults between 19-26 thus encouraging businesses and insurance companies to provide a variety of plans that better meet the individual needs of their employees.

Other suggestions include allowing individuals to deduct out-of-pocket health expenses from their taxable income and allowing individuals and small businesses to more easily access group health plans.

Preventative medicine and lifestyle adjustment education are ways to actually lower medical costs by helping people stay healthy. Making investments in personal health management programs and lowering financial barriers to quality health maintenance pay off in the long term.

Another important aspect of any healthcare plan is a personal responsibility provision. The Massachusetts universal health legislation requires all residents to provide details

about their health insurance policy on their state income tax returns in 2008. This builds a standard to determine who has adequate coverage and who is still in need.

We will be working on these and other healthcare initiatives during the legislative session. The subject is complicated, but we are determined to do our best to see that everyone in Connecticut has access to healthcare that is affordable and adequate.