

## Health Care

Mike

believes health care reform is one of the most pressing issues facing our nation today, and he is committed to promoting a health care system with lower prices, better access, and full coverage. This is why he has sponsored a number of bills that impact a wide variety of important health care issues, including disease prevention, public health efforts, expanded access to care, and increased access to affordable prescription drugs.

From his post as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Health, Mike has taken the issue of health care very seriously. He has successfully passed a number of bills in the House in 2007 and looks forward to a productive 2008. To read more about Mike's efforts on veteran's health care, click [HERE](#).

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Modernizing, Improving and  
Protecting Medicare and Medicaid

Making sure that Medicare beneficiaries have quality care has always been one of Mike's primary concerns. Most recently, he supported H.R. 6331, the "Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008," which became public law on July 15th, 2008. This legislation prevents the pending 10 percent payment reduction for physicians in Medicare, enhances Medicare preventive and mental health benefits, improves and extends programs for low-income Medicare beneficiaries, and extends expiring provisions for rural areas and other providers.

Mike believes that the passage of this bill was important because it will ensure Medicare beneficiaries are able to continue to see the doctors that they trust. The bill established lower annual out of pocket expenses for low-income individuals when Maine residents need it most. In addition, the provisions to protect access to care in rural areas mark an important milestone in the health care arena. By improving payments, this bill helps ensure that sole community hospitals, critical access hospitals, and ambulances can continue to provide much-needed services to Maine residents.

Mike has also supported provisions blocking damaging Medicaid regulations. These provisions place a moratorium until April 2009 on six damaging Medicaid regulations which, if implemented, would slash Medicaid funding by billions and put in jeopardy needed services and protections for millions of vulnerable

beneficiaries.

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### Promoting Mental Health Parity

Under H.R.

1424, the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act, an insurer or group health plan must ensure that any financial requirements - such as deductibles, co-payments, coinsurance, and out-of-pocket expenses - applied to mental health and addiction benefits are no more restrictive or costly than the financial requirements applied to comparable medical and surgical benefits that the plan covers. Mike has been a long time supporter of this legislation and was pleased that it was signed into law.

The State of Maine already requires full mental health parity, but this bill follows the good work of Maine in making it a national law.

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### Increasing Access to Health Care Coverage for Children

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was created to provide health care coverage to children in families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough to afford private insurance. Many families in Maine benefit from CHIP. As of 2005, just over 30,000 children in Maine received CHIP coverage and about 12,000 more low-income Maine kids will benefit from the reauthorization that Mike supported.

Without health coverage, many children get their care through emergency rooms - the most expensive way to get care - or even worse, they get no care at all, and the long-term bills for their health get much higher. In the long run, study after study shows that a healthy child is more likely to succeed in education and in life. Covering kids is an efficient use of tax dollars and a great investment in the future productivity of our nation.

Mike has been a strong supporter of expanding CHIP so that no child in Maine goes without medical care. He voted to pass H.R. 976, the House-Senate agreement on the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act, which renews and improves CHIP, providing coverage for 6 million children currently covered by CHIP and extends coverage to nearly 4 million uninsured children. Unfortunately the President vetoed this legislation. However, Congress and the President were able to reach a compromise to extend the Chip legislation through March 31, 2009.

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## Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health

As Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Health, Mike has taken an active role in promoting the well-being of our nation's veterans. The subcommittee has legislative and oversight jurisdiction of the Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system, programs, and research apparatus. From his position as Chairman, Mike has successfully fought for an increase in the VA health care budget, passed several pieces of legislation to improve health care for veterans, and continues to provide necessary oversight of the VA health care system. Mike has introduced H.R. 5524, the Rural Veterans Health Care Act. The bill takes a comprehensive approach toward improving care for rural veterans by increasing the number of facilities and the amount of outreach; encouraging recruitment and training of health care professionals; focusing on research; and developing the information technology infrastructure needed to enhance services in rural areas. Many of our returning veterans also have mental health issues. In July, 2007 the House passed H.R. 2874 which includes provisions to train returning veterans to do peer-outreach and to contract with community providers to provide mental health services in areas remote from VA facilities. Michaud also played a key role in including provisions within the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 regarding mental health care and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

In the 110th Congress, much of the subcommittee's work has focused on health issues related to returning veterans. The House passed a bill Mike authored called the "Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act" (H.R. 327) which establishes a comprehensive program to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans. The House also passed another bill Mike authored called the "Traumatic Brain Injury Health Enhancement and Long-Term Support Act of 2007" (H.R. 2199) which would develop a comprehensive program for the long-term traumatic brain injury rehabilitation. This work is the result of the efforts of members from both sides of the aisle to address TBI and to begin to improve the outreach and oversight of health care provided to our rural veterans. The subcommittee has held hearings on issues such as the VA Polytrauma Center System of Care, access to healthcare for veterans, Vet Centers and the VA's long-term care programs. For more on Mike's work for veterans click [HERE](#).

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## Making Health Care More Affordable

Mike strongly believes that it is time to reform the health care system in America. The United States spends almost all of its health care dollars on treatment and only about 1% on prevention. Experts agree that if we really want to start cutting back on the cost of health care, a robust investment in prevention would be a good place to start.

Mike is a strong supporter of measures that promote preventative health care, including the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant (PHHS) program. The PHHS program was created to give states the flexibility to tailor prevention and health promotion programs to their particular needs. According to State of Maine's CDC, the funding obtained through these grants helps provide vital services such as laboratory testing for Hepatitis and sexually transmitted diseases, enhanced surveillance for rabies, and coordinated health programs for children. The funding also goes toward ensuring that people can access preventive health services, improving the collection of disease and health data, providing education to improve public health, and targeting resources to assist populations at high risk for disease and injury.

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## Prescription Drugs

Unbelievably, the United States is the only industrialized nation that does not negotiate for lower cost prescription drugs. The first bill Mike introduced after being elected to Congress was a national version of the innovative Maine Rx law, called America Rx (H.R.1694 in the 108th Congress, and H.R. 1655 in the 109th Congress). The idea behind America Rx was to allow the federal government to negotiate with the pharmaceutical industry for lower prices. The bill used the power of the free market and volume purchasing to make medicines more affordable.

## Leaders

in Congress recognized that this approach made commonsense. On January 12th, 2007, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4, the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act, which directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate with drug companies for lower drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries. Unfortunately H.R. 4 died in the Senate. Mike is committed to this cause and will continue to fight for these important changes so that overall health care costs and the price that seniors pay for their medications can be reduced.

## In addition

to his efforts in Congress, Mike has worked to bring low-cost medicine directly to Mainers. In 2003, in the wake of massive job losses throughout the state, Mike joined with Senator Snowe to ask the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) to help Mainers gain access to lower cost medicines. The result was Rx Cares for ME, a joint effort between PhRMA and a number of Maine health organizations designed to give Mainers a single, central point of access for patient assistance programs. Through Rx Cares for ME, Mainers can determine if they are eligible for hundreds of programs that provide thousands of medicines free or at a reduced cost. Applicants are asked four simple eligibility questions, and are then given assistance in the application process in any programs for which they meet the eligibility requirements.

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## Preventing Genetic Discrimination

Mike and his colleagues passed H.R. 493, the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, into law. This new law prohibits health insurance companies and employers from discriminating against people on the basis of genetic test results. Passing this bill into law helps removes the fear that has prevented many Americans from undergoing testing necessary for early treatment and prevention of genetic-based diseases.

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## Stem Cell Research

Mike is a

strong supporter of legislation boosting stem cell research, which promotes life-saving research by increasing the number of stem cell lines that are eligible to be used in federally-funded research. Unfortunately, the President vetoed the bill after Congress passed it.

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## Maine Health Care Advances

Over the years, Mike has helped to secure over \$4 million in funding for the Maine Institute for Human Genetics and Health (MIHGH). The Institute's three partnership institutions - Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems (EMHS), The Jackson Laboratory, and the University of Maine Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences - intend to attract nationally ranked scientists, research grants, students and faculty. This Institute is considered a natural progression of the pioneering work created by these three entities to help lower health care costs. The Institute will aim to produce new medical breakthroughs that can move from the laboratory to human populations, especially aging and chronically ill populations in rural Maine. This research could improve the health status and health care costs in rural Maine. The region will also benefit from new commercial firms that will want to work in close proximity to the innovative research in the MIHGH.

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## Health Care for Small Businesses

Unfortunately, health care costs continue to spiral out of control. This is a huge burden on small businesses, and has been cited as a major cause for the slow job recovery nationwide. Mike believes that we need to get a handle on this problem and take steps at the national level to lower costs.

To help address this problem, Mike supports providing self-employed individuals with a tax deduction for health insurance premiums. In addition, he is a strong supporter of the Small Business Health Insurance Promotion Act, which would give small businesses and self-employed individuals a fifty percent tax credit to defray the cost of health insurance. This legislation would also create state and national multi-insurer pools with coverage similar to the Federal

Employees Health Benefit Program - the benefits that all federal employees receive.

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Medical  
Malpractice

Rapidly rising medical malpractice insurance premiums are crippling medical practices all across America. Immediate steps must be taken to end frivolous lawsuits and reduce premiums to ensure that physicians in Maine can do what they do best - practice medicine.

To remedy this problem, Mike believes that we must have a comprehensive and effective solution to help weed out frivolous lawsuits with a stringent pre-trial review process and with post-trial sanctions in cases where claims are found to be without merit. It is also important to repeal the federal antitrust exemption for medical malpractice insurance companies in order to increase competition and decrease premiums, and Mike believes that we should require insurance companies to pass along savings to their customers, rather than use high premiums as a tool to drive profits. Finally, Mike believes that we need to support doctors who want to practice in fields with higher risks by providing grants so they can practice in all fields and areas, and so that all patients have access to high-quality health care.

Mike remains firmly committed to protecting physicians and other health care providers in Maine from rising malpractice premiums, and will work with his colleagues to find a balanced approach that attacks the problem on all fronts.

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Substance  
Abuse

Many

communities in Maine are fighting substance abuse. Our friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers may be secretly fighting addiction today without anyone's knowledge.

As a member of the Addiction, Treatment and Recovery Caucus, Mike is fighting in Congress to increase funding for substance abuse prevention as well as addiction recovery. Mike supports attacking this problem with a multifaceted approach.

Mike has cosponsored a number of important pieces of legislation to increase access to treatment, including the Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act (which became public law on October 3, 2008) and the Time for Recovery and Equal Access to Treatment in America Act (TREAT America). Both the Wellstone and TREAT America Acts would improve insurance coverage for substance abuse treatment, bringing them up to par with other medical and surgical benefits. Without parity in insurance coverage, treatment is often unaffordable and underutilized, worsening the dependence on the substances and increasing the cost to society.

These are important steps in promoting recovery, but we must also focus on prevention. Mike supports the Health Professionals Substance Abuse Education Act. This bill would provide grants to train health professionals to recognize and provide treatment to patients with substance abuse problems.

With assistance and access to treatment and support groups, addiction can be overcome, but there must be help from a supportive group. Mike believes strongly that addiction and substance abuse are not problems that we can afford to ignore.

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