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## Inglis seeing health care in new way

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Paula and Richard DiDonato had good insurance when breast cancer struck Paula two years ago at the age of 41.

Then Richard had to leave his job as an executive in the high-tech field to care for his wife.

COBRA insurance -- at a cost of \$977 a month -- is getting the Simpsonville couple through now. But they worry what will happen once that runs out. Will there be a new job with insurance, and will it be affordable? Will Paula's breast cancer be covered or excluded as a preexisting condition?

"We could not find a company that would underwrite any cancer coverage and the state (high-risk pool) costs \$1,500 a month," Paula DiDonato told Rep. Bob Inglis at one of his town hall meetings on health care last week. "Here we are middle-class, hard-working people. And this is happening to us."

The DiDonatos were among about 75 who attended the meeting, where Inglis talked about the country's health care system and listened to constituent concerns.

"They have every reason to be frustrated. They've got real challenges," Inglis said. "It's hard to see how people of ordinary means can afford \$1,000 a month."

Preexisting conditions, uncovered illnesses, hefty insurance company profits. Even Congressional raiding of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. Inglis got an earful.

Scott Black of Greer, for instance, talked about insurers.

"Some strong cases were made...about the games insurance companies play, ruthlessly pursuing profits on the back of American citizens," Black said after the meeting. "They should be addressed."

Black, 45, an account manager for a pharmaceutical company, said it was the first time he'd ever been to a town hall meeting.

"I feel it's very important for citizens to engage the politicians that represent them on issues that are important instead of just sitting around and complaining to friends and family," he said.

Health care is a complex issue that defies easy answers, he said. But the country needs to address it and soberly consider all the implications.

Paula DiDonato also shared more thoughts after the meeting.

"We believe that Americans have a fundamental right to accessible, affordable and quality health care and the system doesn't allow that unless you belong to a group plan," she said. "And even then, so many people fall through the cracks. There are so many good hardworking people. And all it takes is one significant illness or accident to put a family in financial distress."

Inglis began his tour in February, and at each stop has heard stories like the DiDonato's. And meeting with health care providers, businesses and residents has changed his mind on a couple of issues, coming to the realization that most health care costs are the result of a few very sick people and how that financial risk is handled.

"One is my misunderstanding about the real story of health care being a few sick people with substantial medical bills rather than it's all of us with routine expenses," he said. "The second thing was at the moment you're in the greatest need, the insurance companies try to not spread the risk, but make you own those risks. It's contrary to the whole concept of insurance."

He said he's not sure whether the solution is national health care or lower insurance costs. "But we need to figure out a way to effectively spread those risks," he said.

Along the way, Inglis said, he has met dedicated people pushing for real solutions. And at the end of the tour, he hopes to bring them together and hash out policy prescriptions.

"There's a lot of interesting work left to be done," he said. "And we need to act on these things."

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