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LENGTH: 936 words**HEADLINE:** IDEAS THAT WORK ON HEALTH CARE**BODY:**

WASHINGTON, June 22 -- The office of Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., issued the following news release:

U.S. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell made the following remarks on the Senate floor Monday regarding the importance of getting it right on health care reform: "As the debate over health care reform continues, a number of different approaches have now emerged. But one thing unites us: all of us agree that health care reform is needed. The question is what kind of reform: a reform that cuts costs and expands access, or a so-called reform that leads to a government takeover where premiums are increased but health care is delayed, denied, and rationed. "The American people want reform.

But they want reform that allows them to keep their current insurance while preserving the freedoms, choices, and quality of care they now enjoy. That's why Republicans have proposed a series of reforms to lower costs and improve access, without destroying what people like about our health care system. "As it turns out, President Obama has said that he's open to some of the ideas Republicans have put forward, such as the need to reform our medical liability laws to discourage junk lawsuits, and the need to encourage wellness and prevention programs that have proven to be effective in cutting costs and improving care. "In fact, during a speech last week to the American Medical Association, the President discussed one particular wellness and prevention program at the Safeway supermarket chain, which has dramatically cut that company's health care costs and employee premiums. The President even said he'd be open to helping businesses across the nation adopt wellness and prevention programs like the Safeway plan. "And yet the bill that Democrats are now trying to rush through the Senate would actually ban this program from being copied and implemented by other companies. "This makes no sense. All last week, we heard eye-popping cost estimates for health care proposals coming out of Capitol Hill - proposals that wouldn't even solve the entire problem but would bury us deeper and deeper in debt. If the goal is to decrease costs, why wouldn't Democrats in Congress support a plan that we know has been effective in doing so - especially if the President himself supports it. One would think this would be an easy bipartisan feature of any Democrat plan. "According to Safeway CEO Steve Burd, Safeway's per capita health care costs have remained flat even as the per capita health care costs of most American companies have increased by nearly 40 percent since Safeway implemented its wellness and prevention plan in 2005. "Safeway's plan has also reduced the health care costs for employees and their families by offering incentives to workers who adopt healthier lifestyles. Those employees who choose to participate in the plan are tested for tobacco usage, for a healthy weight, and for their blood pressure and cholesterol levels. "Employees who pass these tests are given discounts on their health care premiums. For example, if employees pass all four tests, their annual premiums are reduced by \$780 for individuals and \$1,560 for families. And if employees miss their goals the first time, the company provides support for improvement and financial incentives for those who make progress. "All of this makes health care more affordable; and it also helps to improve the health and quality of life of Safeway's workers. The company's obesity and smoking rates are now about 70 percent of the national average, and employees like the plan so much that 76 percent of them want more incentives that reward healthy behavior. "Safeway executives estimate that if the United States had adopted its approach in 2005, the country's direct health-care bill would be \$550 billion less than it is now. "The Safeway program has proven so successful that the company wants to increase its incentives for rewarding health behavior. Unfortunately, current laws restrict it from doing so. But instead of offering legislation that corrects the problem, the so-called reform bill being pushed through the HELP Committee would do the opposite: it would actually prohibit companies from implementing

the Safeway program. "Let me repeat that: The bill that's currently being pushed through the HELP Committee doesn't let companies consider an employee's health status when providing insurance - meaning employers would be banned from rewarding healthy behavior like Safeway does and offering lower premiums to workers who manage their chronic diseases, eliminate high-risk behaviors like smoking, or lose weight. In other words, it would prohibit companies from implementing programs that have been proven to cut health care costs. I thought that was the point of health reform...

"When it comes to making health care more affordable, we should all support ideas that work. Americans want health care ideas that cut costs and improve care. The Safeway model is an excellent place to start. The President supports it. Republicans support it. And Safeway's experience has shown that it works. If Democrats in Congress are serious about making health care more affordable, they should support it too. Instead of the rush and spend, rush and spend approach that has led to a chaotic process and hugely expensive health care proposals that don't even address the whole problem, Democrats should slow down and consider ideas that have been shown not only to be effective in delivering care, but also effective in reducing costs."For more information please contact: Sarabjit Jagirdar, Email:- htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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