

# SENATE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

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## Email Letterhead

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### NEWS RELEASE • NEWS RELEASE • NEWS RELEASE

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#### **SENATORS MORRIS AND BARNETT OUTLINE SENATE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON HEALTH CARE PROPOSALS**

TOPEKA – Senate President Steve Morris (R-Hugoton) today stood with task force chairman, Sen. Jim Barnett (R-Emporia) and the members of the Senate President's specially appointed Task Force on Health Care to outline the task force's findings and initiatives for the session.

President Morris opened the news conference saying "At the beginning of this process, I said we need to look at the whole health care system with fresh eyes, with new ideas. I am pleased to say the ideas and initiatives that have come out of this effort address our health care challenges in creative and unprecedented ways. The results of our task force may provide a path for us to follow through uncharted territory. We have had to meet this need head on; we've had little or no help from the federal government. I believe the recommendations you will hear today are responsible and realistic. I look forward to the opportunity to put our plans through the process."

Morris then introduced task force chairman Sen. Jim Barnett (R-Emporia). Barnett lead the rest of the news conference, saying, "Today's system of universal care health provided through the emergency room is not efficient, affordable or sustainable. The actions proposed today by the Senate Task Force will make health care and health insurance both more accessible and more affordable for Kansans."

Sen. Barnett then outlined the Task Force on Health Care proposals: four specific steps to improve the health of Kansans and to provide affordable and quality health care to all citizens.

**Step 1 - Children First.** Currently, there are 46,000 uninsured children in Kansas. However, 71% already qualify for existing programs, but do not use them. The Task Force supports enhanced efforts to increase participation in these programs by the use of on-line enrollment and expanded outreach programs targeting populations that qualify for these benefits.

**Step 2 – Prevention Pays.** The leading cause of preventable death and illness in our State is related to the use of tobacco. The Task Force supports a comprehensive tobacco prevention program for Kansas. Beginning April 2008, an additional 15 to 16 million dollars will be available to Kansas from the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement. The Task Force supports committing the use of those funds to develop a comprehensive program based on the successful model authored by the Center For Disease Control and commit to a ten year program. The Task Force therefore encourages the passage by the 2007 Legislature of Senate Bill 318.

**Step 3 – Early Detection.** The Task Force supports expanded screening for newborns from our current level of four tests to twenty-nine. This effort represents a true and meaningful step in the direction of early diagnosis and early intervention that will pay immeasurable benefits in future years.

**Step 4 – Kansas Healthcare Connector.** The Task Force recognizes the need for significant health care reform in the market place. Minor nudges or tweaks to the current system will not be enough. The Task Force supports the following changes.

- Increased portability and ownership by individuals of health care policies;
- The use of pre-tax dollars to purchase health insurance whenever possible;
- Expand the role of the consumer in health care decisions;
- Using Federal dollars to subsidize premiums, realizing that Congress is looking for States prepared with innovative ideas for insuring low income families.

The Task Force recommends passage of enabling legislation by the 2007 Kansas Legislature for creation of the Kansas Healthcare Connector and implementation by the Kansas Health Policy Authority by the year 2009.

The Senate President's Task Force on Health Care was comprised of seven senators (5 Republicans and 2 Democrats, reflecting the political balance of the Kansas Senate): Chairman Sen. Jim Barnett (R-Emporia), Sen. Pete Brungardt (R-Salina); Sen. Julia Lynn (R-Olathe), Sen. Roger Pine (R-Lawrence), Sen. Roger Reitz (R-Manhattan), Sen. David Haley (D-Kansas City) and Sen. Laura Kelly (D-Topeka). Both Sens. Barnett and Reitz are practicing physicians.