

Legislation on workplace wellness programs would cut health costs

One of the major issues facing decision makers in government and business is the rising cost of health care. Something has to be done to make health insurance more affordable and more available in our country.

Given the complexity of the health care issue, it is unlikely that a comprehensive solution will be found anytime soon. I favor reforms that allow small businesses to join together to negotiate more affordable insurance rates for their workers. I also support efforts to end frivolous lawsuits and stop the costly practice of defensive medicine.

Many Democrats support universal government-run health care.

While we all agree that costs need to come down and insurance coverage needs to expand, there are big policy disagreements on how we get there. While these differences get ironed out, there are several concrete steps we can take now to help make health care more affordable.

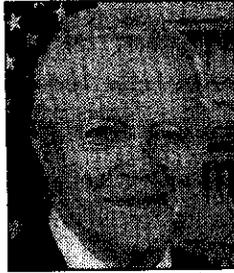
I believe we need to promote wellness and prevention programs in the workplace. Americans can improve their personal health and help save their employers a lot of money by practicing wellness strategies in their daily lives.

The hectic nature of our lives has made taking care of our bodies and health more difficult. There never seems to be enough time in the day to exercise or eat at home.

We are constantly on the run, and it is easier to grab a Big Mac than to make it home for a healthful home-cooked meal.

Bad eating habits and lack of exercise are two of the driving forces behind the development of chronic illnesses that

GUEST OPINION



JOE KNOLLENBERG

destroy lives and drive up health care costs for all of us.

I have introduced legislation to provide tax credits to employers that offer wellness programs in the workplace and for employees who participate in them.

My bill is designed to promote active and healthful living by empowering employers to educate their workers about wellness and prevention.

Companies that offer wellness programs on fighting obesity, managing stress, exercising and maintaining a

healthful diet will be eligible for a \$200 tax credit for every employee who participates.

The employee engaging in the workplace wellness program will also receive a \$200 tax credit.

By promoting wellness and preventive medicine in the workplace, I believe we can have a significant effect on lowering health care costs for employers and working families.

The old saying is true: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." We need to prevent illnesses like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

My bill empowers businesses and their workers to take control of their own health care.

It is a good first step that I hope will garner bipartisan support. Comprehensive health care reform is a big task that will take years to complete. Let's not allow "the perfect" to be the enemy of the good. We can and should do something this year to promote wellness in the workplace.

Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Hills, represents Michigan's 9th Congressional District.