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Lawmaker Gets Flak for Health-Plan Idea

By LOUISE RADNOFSKY

PIEDMONT, S.C. -- U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis is a Republican who says he doesn't support the president's approach to health care. But Mr. Inglis's efforts to suggest other ways the government could change the system have stirred up his upstate South Carolina district.

"I think there's no right to health care," Mr. Inglis told constituents at a town meeting. "You don't have an obligation to provide me housing, food or health care.... But here's the funny thing, I believe as somebody that believes in a Christian ethic, a Judeo-Christian ethic, that I have an obligation to provide care for the least of these."



Associated Press

Rep. Bob Inglis, shown in October at a debate in South Carolina, opposes the president's plan but does support requiring everyone to have health insurance.

Mr. Inglis favors requiring everyone to carry health

insurance, which he said the government "is uniquely suited" to enforce. He also supports making insurers guarantee coverage to anyone willing to pay for it, subsidizing premiums for people on low incomes and a series of policy changes intended to reduce premiums for everyone.

He is finding it risky as he searches for a middle ground acceptable to those who support providing more people with coverage, and those who don't want any expansion of the government's role.

The congressman faces four conservative challengers in a Republican primary next year. Nationally, just 21% of respondents to a NBC News poll released Tuesday said they approved of how Republicans in Congress were handling the health-care issue.

David Thomas, a state senator from Greenville who is one of Mr. Inglis's challengers in the primary next year, said in reference to Mr. Inglis's proposals: "Anything that smells of a socialistic approach to government and to involvement in the health-care system, I don't think I'd make it into an issue, it is automatically an issue."

Others have responded more enthusiastically to Mr. Inglis's ideas. "I'm impressed with them... as a Republican I think he's offering some things which are very non-Republican," said Chris DeJong, a retiree living in Greenville who said he started to vote Democrat in 2004. Mr. DeJong is a legislative volunteer for AARP.

At his meetings, Mr. Inglis has been trying to reassure

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conservatives worried about big government, the Constitution, the deficit and illegal immigration while also persuading President Barack Obama's supporters that he had an alternative to the administration's proposals.

Mr. Inglis says he opposes what he calls "Obama Care" because it includes public funding for abortion and a government-provided option for coverage that would ultimately cause "a devaluation of life" and public costs to spiral upward.

"You talk about free enterprise and then you talk about turning around and giving money to people to subsidize health care! There's an inconsistency there," one man yelled at a meeting on Monday. A woman who asked how people could be expected to find the money for compulsory health insurance complained that he was dodging her question.

But Mahlon Helmuth, pastor of the Tabernacle of Faith in Piedmont, said Mr. Inglis gave an "excellent" answer to his question about whether health care was guaranteed by the Constitution. Mr. Inglis said: "It doesn't say you've got to, and it doesn't say you can't."

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