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United States Senate

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July 19, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary of Health and Human Services
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

As you work to define the preventive services provisions included in the Affordable Care Act (ACA), I urge you to clarify the rules concerning medications or medical procedures that will be categorized as preventative services to be provided free of charge, without a co-pay, to consumers. As this work continues, I encourage the Department to include birth control in the list of preventative services under the ACA.

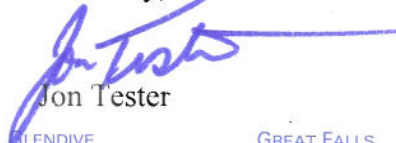
I agree with the findings of the non-partisan Institute of Medicine (IOM), which today found that that access to prescription birth control should be categorized as a preventative service that must be covered by insurance plans without additional cost. Such a determination will go a long way towards improving the lives of young women in Montana. One in three women has struggled with the cost of prescription birth control at some point in their lives. No-cost birth control would relieve women of the burden of choosing a large monthly expenditure on birth control or forgoing their reproductive health needs for other essential monthly costs. It is widely known that family planning and birth control are essential components to preventing unintended pregnancies – an important way to reduce the number of abortions in this country. Access to family planning and no-cost birth control provides women the autonomy to make decisions about when to start a family and the freedom to realize economic stability.

For the 98 percent of American women who use some form of contraception during their lives, birth control is basic and essential healthcare. Ensuring that women have access to contraceptive options that meet their health needs is essential to diminishing the significant personal and societal costs of unintended pregnancy.

The inclusion of birth control as a preventative service is in line with Montana values. Montana's health insurance companies are already required to cover birth control equitably with other prescription medications. The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and other prominent medical groups consider family planning, including birth control, to be recommended preventative care. Therefore, I encourage you to accept the IOM recommendations and include family planning as a no-cost benefit required by law.

Thank you in advance for your prompt consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester

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