

In four sessions of a town-hall meeting on health care reform, Republican Congressman Mike Coffman talked to and, in many cases, heard plenty from more than 600 people Wednesday night.

The crowds were hardly as boisterous as some others have been at health care talks across the country, but at times the questions were pointed and the emotions charged.

Coffman said he agrees with President Barack Obama on many points: The current system is too expensive for many people, current curbs on pre-existing conditions were excessive, and price breaks and competition available to big businesses aren't there for small businesses and individuals.

"The president should be commended for raising these issues," said the freshman congressman from Aurora.

But Coffman worries about the cost to taxpayers, and he opposes the public-option proposal that would offer affordable insurance from the government.

"The public option is a path to a single-payer system in America," he said, a system that some audience members likened to socialism.

Coffman said he would offer an amendment to require members of Congress to use the public option, if it is passed, which drew applause at each session in which he mentioned it.

But one audience member said 30 percent of Americans are uninsured, so 30 percent of congressional members should be denied coverage as well, again garnering applause from

some in the crowd.

Coffman said he thinks reforms should not be rushed. Leaders' top priority right now is revitalizing the economy.

"This country is drowning in red ink right now," he said.

Forcing companies to either provide health insurance to employees or pay a government surcharge is a "job-killer," he said, recalling a small business he had started that did not provide insurance for employees for the first seven years.

Audience member Sandra Osborn-Hill said she works for a company that provides human-resources services to small businesses.

One of her clients is facing a 68 percent increase in premiums for his employees, she said. Those employees make an average of \$35,000 a year, she said, and passing on insurance costs would leave his workers with a net income of only about \$8,000, she said.

All the private insurers want relatively the same increase, she said. "The math doesn't work, but without a public option, he has no choice," she said.

Opponents said they did not want the government involved in their medical decisions.

Kent Lozo talked about how doctors found a pancreatic tumor in his wife in June, and surgery removed it, thanks to his insurer.

"Yes, we need some reforms, but for God's sake, let's leave the delivery of health care alone," he said.

He urged Coffman to oppose the current bill, enact limits on lawsuits against doctors and deny health care to illegal immigrants, the latter of which drew a standing ovation from about half the audience.

Before the meeting, a small group, most of them opposed to Obama's plan, waved signs outside the Arapahoe County government building.

Several refused to give their names.

"I don't want Obama coming after me," said a man in his 20s holding a sign that stated, "Who knows what evil lurks in the minds of legislators."

He argued with some supporters of the Democrats' proposals and charged, "Public options destroy private plans."

Coffman's earlier positions have been more closely aligned with protesters than supporters of Obama's proposals, calling it a "takeover," rather than "reform," of private health-insurance practices.

Colorado's other congressional members have faced boisterous crowds.

On Friday, hundreds of people for and against health-care efforts swamped a meeting in Boulder held by Democratic Rep. Jared Polis of Boulder.

By Joey Bunch

As reported in [The Denver Post](#)