

DesMoinesRegister.com

July 23, 2009

'Health care debate has stretched 40 years'

By *TONY LEYS*
tleys@dmreg.com

Americans hoping for health-care reforms should not be discouraged by news of snags and arguments in Congress, a top aide to President Barack Obama said in Des Moines on Wednesday.

"There's a rhythm to getting things done in Washington," said Melody Barnes, Obama's domestic policy adviser.

Barnes spoke at Des Moines University during a conference organized by the Iowa Initiative, a group that wants to reduce unintended pregnancies. Her speech came as congressional committees form what could be the broadest changes in American health care in decades.

Barnes responded to Republican criticism that the administration is pushing the legislation through too quickly and that Americans won't get a clear look at the bill before it becomes law.

"I think everyone needs a reality check on that," she said. "Because the reality is we're pressing forward after 40 years of debate on this issue; after over 30 hearings in one Senate committee alone this year; after 50 hours of debate in the Senate Health, Education and Labor Committee just this year. And we're doing that to make sure we're reforming a broken system and that we're getting this monkey off the back of the American people."

Barnes said she was unconcerned by some polls suggesting the initiative is losing support. She said Americans understand the cost of a broken health-care system. Even hospitals, insurers and doctors' groups, which opposed previous reform attempts, are at the negotiating table this time, she said.

However, the current arguments were to be expected, she said. "This won't be easy," she said. "If it were easy, we'd have done it a long time ago."
