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Iowa's economy needs health reform

Critics of health-care reform argue that changing the system is too costly, but it's the status quo we can least afford.

Caring for the uninsured will cost Iowa health providers \$935 million this year - while the number without coverage continues to swell. More than 302,000 residents already live in fear of getting sick or injured, yet every day another 70 of our neighbors, friends and families fall into that vast pool of the uninsured.

This should be of considerable concern in rural counties, where lack of insurance is no less an issue than lack of access to primary care. More than 247,000 Iowans - or nearly one in 10 - can't access a primary-care provider due to physician shortages. Without reform that expands the numbers of doctors, nurses and dentists these communities will face long-term economic challenges because analyses show that companies do not locate or launch in communities without adequate health care.

In all their arguments against reform, critics are wrong on at least one point: They state those with insurance don't have a stake in change. The fact is Iowa's overall economic well-being depends upon reform every bit as much as the people we know who struggle without access to care.

-Niel Ritchie, executive director, The League of Rural Voters, Minneapolis, Minn.