

By Rep. Steve King

Margaret Thatcher once said, "I love argument, I love debate. I don't expect anyone just to sit there and agree with me, that's not their job." Most Americans would agree with Prime Minister Thatcher's sentiment.

Spirited debate and free speech are imperative components of our democracy. Without the First Amendment, America is no better than monarchies of centuries past or the totalitarian regimes of today.

In Congress, I have never supported hiding the details of legislation. Without transparency, Congress is nothing more than a secret club making decisions without input from the American people.

In November of 2006, when liberal Democrats regained control of Congress, Speaker Nancy Pelosi pledged to create "the most honest, most open, and most ethical Congress in history." Under Speaker Pelosi's leadership, this year the House has taken significant steps away from the openness and transparency she promised.

Massive spending bills are often muscled through the House without giving Representatives time to analyze their details or debate the bills in their respective committees. The American people often learn about the details of spending bills only after they pass the House or Senate.

The worst example of this occurred in February. Speaker Pelosi gave Members less than 24 hours to read the massive economic "stimulus" spending bill she pushed through the House. The final vote on the 1,073 page, \$789 billion bill occurred Friday afternoon after the legislation was posted online for the first time

at 10:45 p.m. Thursday night. Debate began on the legislation at 9:28 a.m. Friday morning.

Pelosi and her liberal allies have used similar tactics to pass other bloated bills. Now, as Congress considers landmark government-run health care, there are signs they may do the same thing. Liberals are meeting behind closed doors and working out the details of their bill away from the public's eye.

I refuse to allow such strong-armed practices to continue in the House. I recently signed the Let Freedom Ring Health Care Reform Pledge. The pledge states that I will oppose any health care proposal I have not read and that has not been publicly available for at least 72 hours prior to its Congressional vote.

The pledge is available at www.letfreedomringusa.com/pledge-to-read . To date, 120 House members have signed this important pledge.

I believe that liberals have put forth a health care plan that will empower Washington bureaucrats to control our health care system. A massive government health care takeover like this should not be considered lightly.

Signing this pledge is an indication of how seriously I take all attempts to reform our health care system. Americans cannot allow a bloated, big-government proposal to be rammed through the legislative process without appropriate review.

As dangerous as I believe the liberal proposal is for the future of America, it would be more dangerous to completely shut the American people out of the legislative process. Every American should have a minimum of 72 hours to read, study and dissect any health reform proposal that comes up for a full House vote.