

POLITICS

Some Warren Backers Want More Details on Her Health Plan

The senator has so far stuck to the broad principle that overall health-care costs will go down and the wealthy will pay more



Democratic Presidential Candidate Sen. Elizabeth Warren spoke at a town hall event on Friday in Norfolk, Va. PHOTO: ZACH GIBSON/GETTY IMAGES

By Joshua Jamerson

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NORFOLK, Va.—As Elizabeth Warren faces pressure from her rivals in the Democratic presidential primary to outline how she'd pay for Medicare for All, some of her own most avid supporters say they too want to hear more specifics.

The debate has put the issue on the front burner. “I don’t think she should just rubber-stamp Bernie’s bill,” said Eric Potter, a retired insurance claims representative from Virginia Beach, Va., referring to Sen. Bernie Sanders’s health proposal.

His wife, Susan, a retired attorney, said at the senator’s Norfolk town hall Friday evening she was surprised to learn in recent weeks that Ms. Warren hasn’t released her own health-care plan. Mrs. Potter said she notices the senator proclaims she is “with Bernie” on health care, although she has presented her own plans on many other topics, like higher education.

“For such a smart person who thinks things out, that’s kind of lazy for her to say,” said Mrs. Potter, who wore a “Warren” ball cap. She and her husband said they plan to support Ms. Warren in the primary, and both expect the senator to release a health-care plan soon. Ms. Potter predicted a Warren plan would “be better than what the [other candidates] have out.”

Ms. Warren’s campaign has declined to say whether it is drafting its own proposal. But her top aides have been calling health care experts in recent weeks as it examines revenue models to fund Medicare for All. A representative for the Warren campaign declined to comment for this article.

Ms. Warren faced sustained criticism at Tuesday’s Democratic presidential debate in Ohio, following her steady rise in the crowded primary field. Her more moderate rivals in the party, from former Vice President Joe Biden to Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, questioned how she would pay for a universal health-care proposal. And there are early signs that support for Medicare for All is slipping.

Mr. Sanders has said taxes would go up to finance Medicare for All, but the increases would be more than offset by lower health-care costs. Asked directly, Ms. Warren has avoided the question of whether the middle class would pay more in taxes—something her rivals have pounced on. “At least Bernie’s being honest here,” Ms. Klobuchar said at the debate.

Ms. Warren hasn’t said whether middle-class taxes would increase because the exact cost of Medicare for All is unclear, given that there are several versions of the framework produced by lawmakers and economists, The Wall Street Journal reported earlier this week. A person familiar with the senator’s thinking said she has chosen to stick to the broader principle that overall costs will go down and that the wealthy will pay more.

“The overall structure is that the very wealthy and big corporations will see their costs go up, but middle-class families will see their costs go down,” Ms. Warren told reporters in Los Angeles earlier this month. “That is how [middle-class families] frame the problem: what their costs will be. And their costs will go down.”

Plans to end the current U.S. health system for a new federally-run program come with widely divergent estimated costs, ranging from \$13.8 trillion to as much as \$36 trillion over 10 years, The Journal has previously reported.

Some 4,000 people attended Friday’s event, according to the campaign. Some attendees, including Ryan Witt, a 28-year-old electrician, wore shirts bearing one of the campaign’s slogans: “Warren has a plan for that.”

Mr. Witt said it isn’t lost on him that Ms. Warren hasn’t presented a full plan on health care. He also notices that she won’t say outright whether the middle class would pay more in taxes under

Medicare for All.

“She hasn’t straight said it, but as I understand it, taxes would go up,” Mr. Witt said, adding that he would find a higher tax bill acceptable if the revenue was used to expand health care access to more people.

He said Ms. Warren faces a dilemma. “If she did say it, ‘more taxes,’ it would alienate some people. On the other hand, I have heard some others, some of my friends, that say it’s kind of shady to not say it,” Mr. Witt said.

He plans to support Ms. Warren in the primary. What’s his advice to her on the health-care dilemma he described? “I say if you’re going to do it, own it.”

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