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AMERICA'S DYSFUNCTIONAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IS A TRAVESTY.

An Open Letter to Members of the New York Congressional Delegation

The American health delivery system is in a crisis, yet this campaign season has not produced a new proposal or debate on how to provide quality, accessible and affordable health care for all New Yorkers as well as the nation. We have quality health care for the wealthy and expensive, substandard health care for everyone else.

If indeed a healthy population is a goal and moral obligation of national public policy, the United States is failing miserably. The recently released report by the highly respected Commonwealth Fund Commission on a High Performance Health System concluded that "when compared to nearly two dozen other industrialized countries; the United States has the highest infant mortality rate and the lowest life expectancy for people who have turned 60." In addition, the Kaiser Family Foundation has also reported that U.S. "health insurance premiums are still increasing twice as fast as wages and inflation." In fact, about two in five small businesses do not even offer health insurance to employees because of increasing costs according to this same report. Employees who do have company-sponsored health insurance are paying significantly more for their annual share for family and individual coverage. We presently have a second-rate, very expensive health care system.

Government's response to this growing crisis has been to create more programs that aim to make health services more available to the public at greater public expense. However, this is like applying a band-aid to a system that is profoundly and fundamentally flawed and creating more bureaucracy, red tape and paperwork. It has been documented that the cost of health care emergencies is a primary cause of **personal bankruptcy**. And the HMO concept, which was conceived to contain costs and offer quality health care, is a failure. The number of uninsured nationally keeps rising and, to quote from The Commonwealth Fund's report, **"U.S. health care is rated wasteful, even perilous"**. Never have a medical emergency on a Friday or try to contact a Primary Care physician after 5:00 PM or on a weekend because in all likelihood, you will never speak with them or anyone who can access your current health records. How could a system be any worse?

In New York State, the cost of health coverage is a major disincentive to business expansion and job growth. Corporations are shedding or reducing health care coverage as a benefit for employees. Finally, Medicare and health-related service costs are creating havoc with local government budgets and contributing to tax increases.

Why is it that it comes to national or state healthcare, cost is always cited as the factor for not moving forward with universal care yet it is well documented that billions of taxpayer dollars are being lost, wasted or misappropriated annually with no government actions to recoup funds. **The American people do not want to the U.S. government to cry poverty when it comes to national health care when hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars are missing on programs such as Iraq reconstruction or Hurricane Katrina relief.** In addition, Medicare fraud is rampant within HMO systems. This waste and fraud are integral components of the present health care crisis and must be eliminated at once.

Candidates for public office should commit to the following:

1. Begin serious negotiations to create a comprehensive, affordable and accessible national health care system that will favorably compare with other industrialized nations worldwide. This should be achieved by 2010. The HMO concept is a failure at controlling costs and improving accessibility to quality health care and therefore should be discarded.

2. Uncouple Medicare payments from individual monthly Social Security payments. The Congressional Research Service has reported that Medicare premiums (Part B and Part D) are “absorbing a growing share of individuals’ Social Security benefits, thereby “lowering an individual’s standard of living”. The fact that Medicare provides NO COVERAGE for hearing loss, vision loss or dental care is a travesty. The Social Security program was never meant to pay for health care, and when Congress passed Medicare legislation in 1996, the dramatic increase in health care costs was not envisioned. The 2007 monthly Medicare deduction from individual Social Security payments is \$ 93.50. And the Social Security Trustees have recommended a 1.4% COLA increase for 2008. This is outrageous given the annual double-digit increase in health care costs and other basic commodities including food, energy and housing. Medicare and other rising health care costs are pushing more and more Americans into a lower standard of living.

3. Immediately introduce competitive pricing for prescription drugs in all existing government programs and therefore eliminate an unnecessary Part D drug program.

4. Mandate simplified paperwork and bureaucratic processes to gain better public comprehension of health plan coverage and needed medical and wellness treatments. Doctors spend an inordinate amount of time and money to handle the growing paperwork associated with patient care, sometimes to the detriment of patient care. And for medical plan participants and patients, an end to 130 page annual benefits booklets featuring small print legalize, often coupled with 30 page supplements, as was recently sent out by one of Rochester’s larger employers and HMO’s.

5. Require U.S. corporations that outsource jobs to continue to pay into the Social Security and Medicare systems for each position lost in the United States.

We, as a nation, cannot continue to ignore the harsh realities of our health care crisis. Our once self-vaunted status as the best health care system in the world has long since vanished. Vague references to “market approach solutions” to this crisis, as mouthed by several presidential candidates, are outrageous since it is insurance and pharmaceutical companies that have contributed to the current crisis. The American people demand real reform. The time for Congress and state government to act is NOW!

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