

CBC Letter to President Obama

Washington D.C.

Today, the Congressional Black Caucus Health and Wellness Taskforce released a letter sent to President Barack Obama in advance of his address to Congress on health care next week. The letter reads as follows:

September 3, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama

President, United States of America

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We eagerly anticipate your address before Congress next week regarding the urgent need to reform America's ailing health care system. As the Members of Congress who represent the men, women and children who are disproportionately under- and uninsured, and whose health and wellness have suffered because of the numerous gaps in our nation's health care system, we are deeply concerned about the current discussions surrounding health care reform and the possibility that current components of the bill such as a robust public option and myriad health disparity elimination provisions may be stricken in order to lower its cost to about \$500 billion. We sincerely hope that you stress unwavering support for the following in your remarks:

1. An unwillingness to reduce the current costs of the health care reform bill. Despite misinformation about health care reform, such drastic cuts are unnecessary. Many of the nation's health and health care experts concur that a meaningful, upfront investment is necessary to adequately mend the nation's broken health care system. The TriComm bill (H.R. 3200), as you know, is budget neutral; in its current state, it is reflective of health legislation that is not only medically and socially appropriate, but fiscally sound. Reducing the overall cost of a budget neutral bill is therefore unnecessary and not a strategy that we do or can support.

2. A strong public health option that will allow the nation's more than 46 million uninsured Americans more than half of whom are people of color to finally have access to affordable, meaningful health care coverage no later than 2013. As you know and we have firmly noted throughout the health care reform debate, a robust public option not only will play a pivotal role in our collective efforts to eliminate uninsurance a public health challenge that detrimentally affects millions of hardworking, innocent Americans but also in our efforts to ensure that every American citizen, regardless of race, ethnicity, geography or gender, has affordable access to meaningful, reliable health care treatments and services when needed. Thus, we firmly believe that the extraordinary benefits of a robust public option to

the health and strength of this nation should, and do, outweigh the immediate, upfront costs associated with creating it.

3. A strong and demonstrative commitment from the White House to, in the days and weeks to come, use health care reform to achieve health equity. This will include not only ensuring the passage of existing health disparity elimination provisions such as those around data collection, workforce diversity and community health workers but also supporting stronger provisions, such as those included in Titles I, II, III and IV of the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2009 (H.R. 3090). These measures are necessary to address the root causes of the health inequities that disproportionately and detrimentally affect racial and ethnic minorities, women, rural Americans and Americans within the U.S. Territories. These provisions are integral to efforts to ensure that as health care reform proceeds, we succeed in closing the gaps in health care that are independent of an insurance coverage, but that millions of Americans fall through and suffer from every day.

4. Inclusion of provisions that will ensure equity and parity for the American men, women and children in the U.S. Territories. The nearly 5 million Americans who live in the U.S. Territories should benefit from health care reform in a manner that is equitable to those Americans who live within the 50 states and in the District of Columbia. This is especially pertinent, given that so many of the nation's worst health and health care trends are in the U.S. Territories. Therefore we urge you to, reiterate your commitment to ensure that these American citizens receive equal treatment under the health care reform bill..

5. Strong consideration of a trigger that will allow for the savings from prevention and other provisions in H.R. 3200 to replace the current pay-fors that have been identified. This strategy will not only allow the realization of true cost savings of prevention, health disparity elimination and other provisions, but it also will provide an avenue through which the savings generated can replace current pay-fors and/or be used to add important services and programs not currently offered because the costs are deemed too high.

We want to assure you and your Administration that the members of the Congressional Black Caucus are committed allies and partners in the fight to reform America's broken health care system. Together we can seize this unique moment in our nation's history to ensure that we not only reform our nation's health care system, but that we transform it in a manner that eliminates uninsurance with a robust public option, achieves health equity for all Americans, and makes us as a nation healthier and stronger.

We appreciate your attention to this letter and look forward to working with you on this critically important legislation.

With regards,

Congresswoman Barbara Lee

Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

Congresswoman Donna M. Christensen

Co-Chair, CBC Health and Wellness Task Force

Congressman Danny K. Davis

Co-Chair, CBC Health and Wellness Task Force