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## NEWSBRIEF

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# America's Agenda Delivers Strong Message to Insurance Industry from Outside and Inside AHIP Conference

**Washington, DC** - Earlier this week, America's Agenda delivered a strong message to health insurance leaders from both outside and inside a conference of America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), the health insurance industry's leading lobbying arm, held at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, in Washington, DC.

Outside the hotel, America's Agenda joined thousands of labor union members and health reform advocates in a spirited rally to support enactment of federal health reform. To cheers from a fired-up crowd, AFL-CIO President Rich Trumfka, AFT President Randi Weingarten, and SEIU leader Anna Burger decried health insurance practices, including shocking premium increases of 30 to 40%, such as those announced by Anthem Blue Cross and other insurers across the country in recent weeks. Labor and political leaders assailed premium hikes that are eroding living standards of working families, forcing loss of coverage, threatening the financial health of American businesses, and undermining employers' capacity to create new jobs.

Click [here](#) to view images of the event.

"Health insurance costs have risen four times faster than workers' wages over the last decade. Health costs are the fastest growing component of business expenditures," points out America's Agenda President Doug Dority.

"This kind of growth in health care costs is doing great harm to America's hard-working families. It is undermining the competitiveness of American business globally and at home, and it's obstructing our recovery from this recession."

America's Agenda Executive Director Mark Blum adds, "Insurance companies have a significant contribution to make to solving America's health cost crisis." "But far too many industry leaders have opted for obstructing reform, rather than standing up and sharing responsibility for solving the crisis. One way or another, this is going to change."

Inside the hotel, Dr. Ken Thorpe, Professor of Health Policy at Emory University and Health Policy Director for America's Agenda, delivered a strong message to health insurance executives gathered at the AHIP conference. In an address to

the insurance leaders, Thorpe emphasized the vital need for passage of a reconciled health reform bill *this year*.

"We are at a major crossroads in the on-going debate over health care reform," declared Dr. Thorpe.

"At this point, we face two and *only* two choices this year - either do nothing or pass a reconciled version of the Senate and House legislation. Failure to pass health care reform will produce clear results. Within ten years nearly 55 million Americans will be uninsured, the cost of private health insurance will double crowding out higher increases in wages, a rising tide of uncompensated care will place our hospitals and health care providers at financial risk.

"The problems will continue to be particularly acute for individuals purchasing insurance on their own and small businesses. Today, they face unpredictable and large variations in premiums, the potential of having their coverage dropped, and denied coverage at any price. These problems will only get worse. Proposed insurance hikes in the individual and small group market of 30 and 40 percent highlight the problem. Regardless of the root cause (largely costs) these increases are not sustainable over time.

'Alternatively we could pass reform and address most of these problems.

"Make no mistake, there are a number of problems with the House and Senate legislation, they include provisions that virtually all disagree with. This is largely traced to the complexity and scope of health care reform in the first place. We will never get to broad universal agreement on all elements of reform, even ones that are less comprehensive. So we face a choice, pass the current bill which represent the second (or third) choice for many, or do nothing and have the system continue to deteriorate..."

Dr. Thorpe pointed out a range of building blocks in the reconciled legislation that will provide a foundation for solving the health cost crisis. Among those he highlighted are: reforms of the health insurance industry, including eliminating pre-existing conditions, rescissions of coverage, annual and lifetime out of pocket limits, rating reforms and guarantee issue; payment and delivery system reforms; provisions to slow the growth in health care spending; and movement toward universal coverage that is critical to reforming the health insurance marketplace and slowing the rate of growth in health spending.

"Sure the reform packages are imperfect, but this is not a one and done effort," Thorpe observed. "We need to build the foundation, move in the right direction, and improve the legislation over time."

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