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Businesses, Unions, Veteran Party Leaders Unite Behind Bipartisan, Consensus Approach to Health Care Reform

Alliance of U.S. businesses, national labor unions, and veteran political leaders announces support for a consensus-based policy framework for reform that will improve outcomes and reduce health care costs for families, businesses, and government; launches national effort to support bipartisan reform agreement in Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C. – America’s Agenda, an organization bringing together an expanding alliance of national and international labor unions, U.S. businesses, and government leaders, announces its support for a set of federal health care reform policy proposals that represent significant areas of consensus in health reform. The recommendations are focused on reducing the rate of growth in health care costs, while also improving the quality of care, and offering a bipartisan approach to reform.

The reform proposals recommended by the diverse alliance of labor and business organizations, which includes veteran leaders of both political parties, reflects a consensus that has emerged among business, labor, and health sector leaders about modernization of America’s health care delivery system seen as essential to containing health care cost growth and achieving sustainable, guaranteed access to affordable, high-quality health care for all Americans.

“President Obama has said that, ‘without a serious, sustained effort to reduce the growth rate of health care costs, affordable health care coverage will remain out of reach,’” said America’s Agenda: Health Care for All Executive Director Mark Blum. “There is general agreement among business and labor leaders that effective health reform must attack the root causes of health care inflation and produce a much more efficient health care delivery system,” said Blum. “What is new – and what our policy recommendations reflect – is the broad consensus that has emerged about how to achieve this goal. We are seeing an historic realignment of former adversaries behind a common approach to modernizing our health care delivery system with a greater national emphasis on preventing chronic diseases, coordinating patient care and support through all stages of treatment, implementing health information technology throughout the health care system, streamlining administration, reducing wasteful inefficiencies, and aligning incentives to encourage both patients and their health care providers to adopt the best health care practices based on solid scientific evidence.”

The set of federal health care policy recommendations announced today builds on America’s Agenda’s extensive hands-on experience in building common ground alliances of business and labor to win far-reaching health care reform legislation in the states.

The group's policy recommendations also build on a series of high profile "Summit Conversations" that America's Agenda has held around the country among national leaders in business, labor, health care, and government to explore the emerging consensus about the kind of modernizations that will enable our health care system to meet the needs of 21st century Americans. (See <http://www.summitconversations.org>)

The America's Agenda policy recommendations provide a consensus-based framework for sensible and achievable national health reform legislation that will reinforce private sector innovation, substantially reduce growth in health costs, and improve the quality of care.

America's Agenda's specific policy recommendations focus in the following areas:

- Federal leadership on a comprehensive national disease prevention initiative;
- A national strategy to improve efficiency and coordination of chronic disease care (associated with 75% of overall national health care expenditures and 95% of Medicare health spending);
- Strengthening of comprehensive primary care;
- Strengthening the evidence basis for best practice guidelines and quality standards;
- Alignment of incentives throughout the healthcare system to encourage best practices;
- Implementation of a national health information technology (HIT) plan that will reduce wasteful administrative costs, enable care coordination, and create a continuous learning system that can instantaneously diffuse new medical information and innovations throughout the system; and
- Guaranteed access to affordable, quality health care for every American.

To view the complete America's Agenda policy recommendations, please visit:

<http://americasagenda.org/federal-health-care-reform-proposals.html>

Former Congressman Dick Gephardt, who serves on the America's Agenda Board of Directors, said, "The number one concern of American families is whether they will be able to afford health care they need or keep the coverage they have. Escalating health costs also jeopardize prospects for our long term economic recovery by undermining the competitiveness of American businesses and diminishing their ability to create jobs."

"If there is a good side to this story, it's that the health cost crisis is bringing together business and labor, the public and private sectors, insured and uninsured Americans at the same table to find solutions," Gephardt said. "With proposals like the one offered today by the union and business organizations of America's Agenda, we are turning the old battle ground of health care reform into a common ground of solutions."

Former Governor and Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, also an America's Agenda Board member, added. "We can solve this cost-driven health crisis in a bipartisan way. I believe we have to, and the proposals America's Agenda is putting forward today provide a roadmap for how to do it."

Alongside Gephardt and Thompson, America's Agenda member organizations include the Alliance for Economic Justice, American Federation of Teachers, American Income Life Insurance Company, American Postal Workers Union, Catholic Healthcare West, Communications Workers of America, International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, IBM, International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, International Association of Fire Fighters, International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, International Alliance of Theatrical, Stage Employees and Moving

Picture Technicians, Laborers' International Union of North America, Office and Professional Employees International Union, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), Service Employees International Union, Sheet Metal Workers International Association, Textron Inc., Union Labor Life Insurance Company (ULLICO), United Mine Workers of America, United Food and Commercial Workers, United Union of Roofers, United Auto Workers.

“We have an unprecedented opportunity to enact key reforms that will bend down the health care cost curve,” said John Butler, Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer for Textron Inc. “Private sector employers have learned valuable lessons over the last fifteen years about how we can reduce growth in health costs and at the same time improve employee health and productivity. We’ve come together to offer these proposals, because we want to assure that our experience can help federal legislators enact health reforms that will be effective in reducing costs and improving outcomes for all Americans.”

IBM Senior Vice President for Human Resources Randy MacDonald said, “To reach the goal of affordable, high quality health care for all, America needs a 21st century health care infrastructure. We need care that is delivered and supported by teams of health care professionals who share information with one another and with patients who participate actively in their own health care. Congress has a unique opportunity to enact reforms that will make that kind of future possible for every American, and we’re here with our colleagues in labor and business to support them in doing it.”

Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) General President Terry O’Sullivan said, “In every contract negotiation, we struggle with our employers to prevent shifting of rising health care costs onto the backs of the workers we represent, but that doesn’t give any of us a long-term solution. We need a health care reform that can drive down the rate of health cost increases that are crushing both workers and their employers. Fifteen years ago, it would not have been imaginable that we would be standing here announcing a common vision for health care with corporate leaders. We may not agree on everything, yet, but the common ground we are defining today for containing health costs and improving quality of care is a very significant step toward the comprehensive health reform Americans need.”

“With health costs rising four times faster than wages over the last ten years, working families are losing their grip on a middle class standard of living,” added Iron Workers Union General President Joseph Hunt. “We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a meaningful change that will help the economy and benefit our children and grandchildren. We can’t miss it.”

America’s Agenda plans to continue its conversations with members of Congress and their constituents about the critical importance of a comprehensive approach to health care reform that effectively ends the unsustainable growth in health costs, yet encourages continuous improvements in quality of care.

“The policy recommendations we’re making to Congress are realistic and they’re achievable,” said Blum. “Our member organizations have committed their energies and resources to supporting Congress’ effort to get the job done.”

“American voters have told us in every way they can that they want reform that will guarantee the affordability of health care. It’s common sense,” he said, “Finally, we’re hearing agreement among leaders in business and labor that puts real solutions squarely on common ground. We’ve

got a way forward to reform that will receive broad support.”

About America's Agenda

America's Agenda brings together national and international labor unions, businesses, and government leaders who share a common commitment to achieving guaranteed access to affordable, high-quality care for every American. America's Agenda has an unrivaled record of success in winning enactment of far-reaching state health care reforms through campaigns the organization has designed and guided based on common ground interests shared by business and labor. America's Agenda recently launched a series of high-profile “Summit Conversations on American Health Care for the 21st Century” that explore the emerging consensus among national leaders of business, labor, health care, and government regarding health care reform. The Summit Conversations are hosted by national leaders like former HHS Secretary Donna Shalala, Congressman Dick Gephardt, and Governor Tommy Thompson, and moderated by Emmy Award-winning commentator Bill Press. Visit America's Agenda online at www.americasagenda.org and watch previous Summit Conversations at www.summitconversations.org.