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United HELP Committee Democrats Support Health Care Reform
Affirm support for a public option run by the government for the public good, not private profit

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Democrats on the Senate’s Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee today reaffirmed their commitment to pass health reform legislation that reduces health costs, protects choice of doctors and plans, and assures quality and affordable health care for Americans. The senators’ statements follow the release of a new estimate on the cost of the *Affordable Health Choices Act* by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. CBO’s new score of the bill is \$611 billion over 10 years - a significant reduction from earlier, incomplete estimates. The new estimate includes a provision on employer responsibility and a strong, national public option, the Community Health Insurance Option.

Statements from all thirteen Democratic and Independent Members on the HELP Committee are below:

“Seeing that every American has quality, affordable health care is one of the great challenges of our time – and we are closer now to meeting that challenge than at any time in history,” said Senator Kennedy. “Congress, the President, businesses, doctors, and working families across the nation are united behind one common goal – making the promise of quality, affordable health care a reality for all Americans.”

“We are on the cusp of the kind of historic reform that has eluded Presidents and the Congress for decades. We must not waste this opportunity by settling for empty gestures and good intentions. The provisions announced earlier today will ensure that reform is affordable, meaningful – and effective,” said Senator Dodd.

"Every consumer knows that the best bet for getting a good deal is when two things are present: choice and competition. And that’s exactly why Americans need to have a public option,” said Senator Harkin. “A public option would ensure real choice – something that is lacking in many parts of the country – and insurance portability that is available nationwide. When a public option and private plans compete head to head, consumers can choose the very best choice for their needs.”

“All across America, families and businesses are being crushed by the rising costs of health care. They are demanding change, and demanding it now. Health care reform cannot wait another year,” said Senator Mikulski. “I am committed to giving Americans the change they want – health care that is reliable, undeniable and affordable. That is what the Senate Democrats health care plan is all about. Our plan will reduce health costs, allow Americans to keep the coverage they have if they want it, and make health insurance affordable to those who do not have it today.”

"This strong public option proposal will ensure that there is real competition between public and private insurance plans. It is an important safeguard, the goal of which is controlling escalating health care costs and extending coverage to millions of Americans for whom health insurance has been out of reach," Senator Bingaman said.

"As we strive to make health care affordable and accessible to all Americans, we need to provide a strong public option. This is a major step towards leveling the playing-field and ensuring quality-based care to those who need it," Senator Murray said.

"We need to reform our health care system in order to ensure America's long-term economic health. This is a fiscally responsible proposal that will give consumers more choices, cut down on ineffective emergency room care, and ensure that every family will have the opportunity to see their family doctor," said Senator Reed. "The community health insurance option will enable more Americans to choose a health care plan that fits their needs, keeping the health care market more competitive which will keep prices low and quality high."

"The United States spends almost twice as much per capita on health care as any other nation and yet we are the only major country without a national health care program guaranteeing health care for all. At a time when Americans have very little trust that private health insurance companies can provide them comprehensive and affordable health care, the very least that we must do is to make sure that every person in our country has the choice of a strong Medicare-type public option," said Senator Bernie Sanders

"Health care reform is about lowering costs for families and businesses while improving medical care," said Senator Brown. "Passing a strong public option will keep insurance companies honest and ensure that all Americans have access to affordable health coverage. By increasing competition in the insurance market, we can lower costs and expand insurance options. It's the right answer for Americans who want to keep their existing coverage as well as those who need new coverage choices. It's time our health care system put American families first."

"This is a strong bill that will cover 97% of Americans and provide peace of mind to those worried about their current coverage," said Senator Casey. "It allows for competition to provide more choice, reduce costs and to make sure that health care works for patients, not the insurance companies. Passage of this bill is imperative for the economic security of American families and for the entire nation."

"My colleagues and I on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee have been working on a plan to reform the health care system in this country. We have crafted a plan that will stabilize health care costs and includes a Community Health Insurance Option, which I support. It is a backstop option for people without access to affordable coverage. Health care providers will not be required to participate, payment rates will be set in a competitive fashion, and the community health insurance option will compete on a level playing field with private health insurance plans in the gateway," said Senator Hagan.

“If you like your doctor and you like your insurance, nothing will change for you. But if you want more options, this bill provides them, while increasing healthy competition that will reduce costs for everyone,” said Senator Merkley. “For far too long, insurance companies have been able to set the rules, charge what they like and revoke coverage on the flimsiest of excuses. The Affordable Health Choices Act will level the playing field for consumers by providing them with more choices.”

“For many, many Americans, a public health insurance option could mean the difference between more of the same old broken system – or the opportunity, at last, for health care they and their families can afford,” Senator Whitehouse said. “As one woman from Barrington wrote me, ‘the word “option” hardly applies: this is a necessity.’”

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