

Congressional Progressive Caucus

<http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov>

80 Strong and Growing: Open to New and Different Ideas

June 5, 2009

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Maxine Waters
Mel Watt
Peter Welch
Robert Wexler

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232
U.S. Capitol

Dear Madame Speaker,

President Obama and you have laid out an ambitious goal to enact health care reform this Congress. The Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) stands united in the call to provide high quality, affordability, and accessibility in healthcare choices for all Americans. As you are aware, the overwhelming majority of CPC Members would prefer a single-payer approach. If a single-payer plan is not enacted, we agree with President Obama that there must be a robust public health insurance option like Medicare offered alongside the private plans.

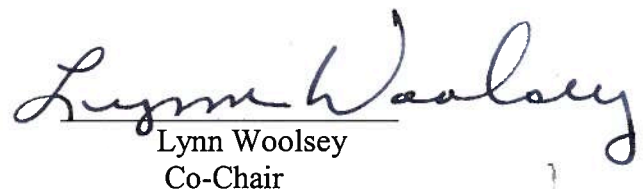
As you and the respective Chairs continue to draft health care legislation, the CPC submits the attached principles that must be included to ensure a public option the CPC can support.

The CPC believes the public plan should provide a guarantee of coverage, affordable, high-quality and accessible healthcare, and lower costs – regardless of income, health status, race, employment, or gender. We strongly oppose any conditions or triggers undermining and limiting the availability of the public option.

We look forward to our continued involvement in the process.

Sincerely,


Raúl M. Grijalva
Co-Chair


Lynn Woolsey
Co-Chair

Cc: Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
Majority Whip James Clyburn
House Democratic Caucus Chairman John Larson
House Democratic Vice Chairman Xavier Becerra
The Honorable Charles B. Rangel, Chair Committee of Ways and Means
The Honorable Henry Waxman, Chair Committee on Energy and Commerce
The Honorable George Miller, Chair Committee on Education and Labor

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Principles for a Public Health Care Option

The Congressional Progressive Caucus stands united behind President Obama's call to provide high quality, affordability, and accessibility in healthcare choices for all Americans. The overwhelming majority of Congressional Progressive Caucus members prefer a single-payer approach. If a single-payer plan is not enacted, we agree with President Obama that there must be a robust public health insurance option like Medicare offered alongside the private plans. This public plan would provide a guarantee of coverage, affordable, high-quality and accessible healthcare, and lower costs – regardless of income, health status, race, employment, or gender. We oppose any conditions or triggers undermining and limiting the availability of the public option.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus calls for a robust public option that **must**:

- Enact concurrently with other significant expansions of coverage and must not be conditioned on private industry actions.
- Consist of one entity, operated by the federal government, which sets policies and bears the risk for paying medical claims to keep administrative costs low and provide a higher standard of care.
- Be available to all individuals and employers across the nation without limitation
- Allow patients to have access to their choice of doctors and other providers that meet defined participation standards, similar to the traditional Medicare model, promote the medical home model, and eliminate lifetime caps on benefits.
- Have the ability to structure the provider rates to promote quality care, primary care, prevention, chronic care management, and good public health.
- Utilize the existing infrastructure of successful public programs like Medicare in order to maintain transparency and consumer protections for administering processes including payment systems, claims and appeals.
- Establish or negotiate rates with pharmaceutical companies, durable medical equipment providers, and other providers to achieve the lowest prices for consumers.
- Receive a level of subsidy and support that is no less than that received by private plans.
- Ensure premiums must be priced at the lowest levels possible, not tied to the rates of private insurance plans.

In conclusion, the public plan, like all other qualified plans, must redress historical disparities in underrepresented communities. It must provide a standard package of comprehensive benefits including dental, vision, mental health and prescription drug coverage with no pre-existing condition exclusions. It must limit cost-sharing so that there are no barriers to care, and incorporate up-to-date best practice models to improve quality and lower costs. All plans, including the public plan, must include coverage for evidence-based preventive health services at minimal or no co-pay. All plans, including the public plan, should be at least as transparent as traditional Medicare.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Congressional Progressive Caucus Lays Out Criteria for Public Option. Vow to oppose healthcare legislation that does not provide robust and affordable public plan

Washington, DC—Today, the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) united behind a set of principles that define a public option to be included in a final health care reform bill in the event that a single payer plan is not enacted. The principles call for a guarantee of coverage, high-quality and accessible healthcare, and lower costs – regardless of income, health status, race, employment, or gender. The principles also state the CPC's strong opposition to any conditions or triggers that might limit the availability of the public plan.

"Americans deserve health care that favors patients over the health insurance companies," said CPC Co-Chair, **Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ)**. "They were given decades to control costs, improve quality and increase access but they have failed. At a minimum, we need to give them real competition in the form of a robust public plan that puts patients first."

"Any legislation passed by Congress must include a robust and affordable public option that is available to every American, and that provides coverage on par with any plan put forth by private insurers," said CPC Co-Chair, **Lynn Woolsey (D-CA)**. "This is not a moment to act cautiously, or to hide behind hollow buzz words or skeleton programs. The Congress must act boldly to develop a health care bill that the public will be proud of, and which will lay the foundation for our nation's future economic growth. A competitive public option must be at the heart of this proposal."

The CPC sent a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi outlining the public option principles. The drafting of the public option principles were led by the CPC health taskforce co-chairs Representatives **Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)** and **Dennis Kucinich (D-OH)**.

Last month the CPC met with House Leadership and recommended U.S. Representatives **Dr. Jim McDermott (D-WA)**, **Donna Edwards (D-MD)**, **Jerrold Nadler (D-NY)**, and **Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX)** to represent the CPC and help draft comprehensive health care reform legislation. The principles sent today will be the outline on which they will negotiate on behalf of the CPC for the most robust public plan.

On April 2, the CPC sent a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid stating that a majority of its members would oppose any legislation that did not include a public option. That was followed up on April 24th with an unprecedented letter to President Obama and the Democratic Leadership of the House and Senate from the leaders of four prominent caucuses consisting of 120 Members– the CPC plus the Black Caucus (CBC), the Hispanic Caucus (CHC), and the Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), stressing that their support for health care reform requires a robust public health insurance plan like Medicare.

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