STATE OF UTAH

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GREG BELL
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

March 11, 2010

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
United States Senate
104 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear ~~Senator Hatch~~, Orrin

I am writing to encourage you to resist the Obama Administration's current push to pass the White House health care reform plan as quickly as possible. As I have outlined in previous communications, the White House plan is not in the best interests of the citizens of the State of Utah.

While in Washington recently with the National Governors Association, I discovered, through discussions with my counterparts, that many are working on state-based health system reform. It quickly became clear, however, that the country's governors were not welcome to participate in the national dialog, which is an unfortunate and critical mistake. States must have the opportunity to address local needs with local solutions and to help shape the national debate.

Simply put, the White House plan does not provide Utah with the flexibility to create solutions and address problems in a manner best suited to our unique needs. A one-size-fits-all "solution" will never address the particular needs of each state and its citizens. States must be allowed flexibility to respond to local markets, institutions, demographics, and issues. At the very least, a federal plan must contain opt-out provisions for states like Utah, which has already come so far in reforming our own health care systems. The current plan does not contain these provisions and, as it stands today, could seriously impede three years of hard work and progress in Utah. These opt-out provisions are critical to states like Utah, which is leading the way in reform.

The White House plan is a rejection of the concept of federalism, which is so vital to our nation. It ignores the fact that the right way to go about reform is to allow the 50 states to be 50 laboratories of innovation. This is the only way to really learn what works and what doesn't, and for whom. For the past three years, Utah has been one of the leading states in developing health care reform, and the results are beginning to show great promise. We have had several successes, particularly with the Utah Health Exchange, and we continue to build on those successes.

Our friends in other states are also beginning to learn what works for them and what does not. If Washington leaders are serious about finding a good solution for the nation, shouldn't they be looking to these states for guidance?

If designed correctly, federal reform that creates flexibility and rewards innovation will provide benefits well into the future. In fact, I would like nothing more than to lend my support to a meaningful bipartisan federal health reform bill. However, there appears to be little interest from the White House to create such a bill. The process the Administration is pursuing all but guarantees that no bipartisan bill will emerge. Yet, here in Utah, all of our health system reform legislation has enjoyed broad bipartisan support. It can – and it should – be done. That message must be heard in Washington.

As Governor, I ask that you continue to work toward a bipartisan federal reform bill. One that recognizes the proper role of the states as laboratories and provides the support we need to be flexible in addressing our unique situations and demographics.

Thank you for your leadership and assistance with this very important issue.

Sincerely,

Gary R. Herbert
Governor

Cc: Senator Robert F. Bennett
Congressman Jim Matheson
Congressman Rob Bishop
Congressman Jason Chaffetz