

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2009

President Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Ensuring access to affordable, quality and portable health care for every American is not a Republican or Democrat issue - it is an American issue. We applaud you for bringing this issue of national importance to the forefront. Our health care system needs fixing. Congress needs to take decisive action not only to expand access to health insurance for all Americans but also to reduce the costs of care and get better value for every dollar we spend on health care. Our nation expects us to solve this challenge in an open, honest and bipartisan manner. Republicans stand ready to work with you on health care reform.

There are many areas of broad agreement about what needs to be done to expand access, improve quality and reduce costs in order to make these efforts successful for millions of Americans. Any successful health care reform proposal must include both Republicans and Democrats and must be subject to the full scrutiny of both the Senate and House of Representatives and the American people. Using the budget reconciliation process to curtail Senate debate and limit amendments would make it difficult to gain broad bipartisan support, and would be a disservice to this important issue. The American people deserve an open and vigorous debate on one of the most difficult challenges facing our nation.

As we deal with the monumental challenge of reforming a sector that constitutes more than 17 percent of our economy, any reforms must be done in a forward-thinking and fiscally responsible manner. The costs of any health care reform proposal should be addressed in a responsible way, especially in light of the pending insolvency of the Medicare Trust Fund and unsustainable rates of growth of Medicaid spending. The creation of new unfunded liabilities for additional health care costs would be both irresponsible and a threat to the long term economic health of the nation.

Any serious health care reform proposal cannot be solely about expanding coverage, but must also include innovative strategies to change the health care delivery system to reduce costs and encourage better value. We must strengthen health care by realigning incentives to provide consistent, dependable quality while promoting the principles of care coordination and prevention. We must continue to harness the powerful promise of advanced research and modern technology to create innovative new treatments and breakthrough cures, promote wellness, and empower consumers with accurate, comprehensive information on quality health care that is available to them.

In contrast, Washington-run programs undermine market-based competition through their ability to impose price controls and shift costs to other purchasers. Forcing free market plans to compete with these government-run programs would create an unlevel playing field and inevitably doom true competition. Ultimately, we would be left with a single government-run program controlling all of the market. This would take health care decisions out of the hands of doctors and patients and place them in the hands of another Washington bureaucracy.

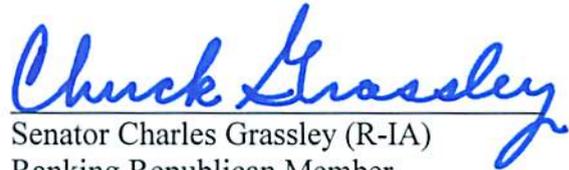
Unfortunately, the beginning of the 111th Congress has been marked by an increasingly partisan and closed process in which health care reform is being addressed piecemeal, including in the stimulus legislation. This was a missed opportunity to demonstrate how we can work together to get things done. Despite this unfortunate start, we nevertheless stand ready to work together with you to develop and pass meaningful health care reform legislation this year.

It is essential that we work together across party lines and we would like to express our strong desire to reject partisan tactics and move forward on this important challenge in a comprehensive, inclusive and bipartisan manner. The White House Health Care Reform Forum is an important step in moving this dialogue forward, and we collectively applaud you for convening it.

Sincerely,



Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
Senate Republican Leader



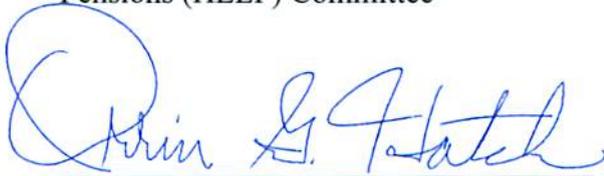
Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA)
Ranking Republican Member
Senate Finance Committee



Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY)
Ranking Republican Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions (HELP) Committee



Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH)
Ranking Republican Member
Senate Budget Committee



Orrin Hatch (R-UT)
Ranking Republican Member
Senate Finance Committee
Subcommittee on Health Care