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Building and Construction Trades Department

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July 20, 2009

The Honorable George Miller, Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles B. Rangel, Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Miller, Rangel and Waxman:

On behalf of the 13 national and international unions who comprise the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, I am writing to inform you that we support H.R. 3200, "America's Affordable Health Choices Act."

America's Building Trades Unions have long supported health care reform that would allow all Americans to gain access to affordable quality health care. We stand with President Obama in his contention that this is a problem of such severity that it can no longer be put off for a future generation to address and must be tackled swiftly.

For decades, health care costs have skyrocketed, and an increasing number of Americans are finding it harder to afford coverage. And for those lucky enough to still have coverage, they find themselves paying more and more for less and less coverage. As this problem has festered, and more people have become uninsured, the health care benefits that our members have negotiated are dramatically escalating in cost, as our plans assume the liability of absorbing the costs of uncompensated care and cost shifting from doctors and hospitals looking to recoup their lost revenues.

More than 160 million Americans currently receive their health insurance coverage through their employer. We are pleased to see that your committees have crafted reform that builds on that successful model, and allows workers to keep what they already possess. Our signatory contractors of whom the majority employs less than 10 employees, and 90% of whom employ less than 20, have seen their companies increasingly placed at a competitive disadvantage with unscrupulous employers who have no interest in providing health insurance. In fact, 30% of our multiemployer health and welfare fund's costs are attributable to cost shifting by employers who do not act responsibly. That is not sustainable, and it certainly is not fair. Given the direction of other provisions in the tri-committee bill, there will be greater opportunities for small businesses to cover all of their employees. It is our position that all employers regardless of size should provide affordable coverage to all their employees or pay an equivalent fee.

Further, we are pleased to see that this legislation will create a Health Insurance Exchange with both private and public plans as options. A public plan is crucial to reining in out of control costs, and creating competition that will truly deliver savings to all Americans both inside and outside the exchange. The exchange will also provide help to both low-income and middle class families in keeping all costs within their means.

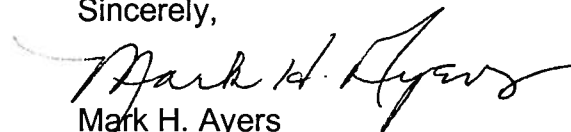
We are additionally pleased that the committees met their promise of paying for reform through means other than taxing working American's health benefits, by finding savings in the existing system, and levying a small surcharge on the wealthy to keep all Americans healthy.

H.R. 3200 is an even better document than the earlier Discussion Draft, and will set the stage for transforming our health care system into one that rewards the quality of health care outcomes, not the number of procedures performed; and will put affordable, quality health care within reach of all Americans.

We look forward to working with Congress to meet President Obama's principles and timeline for health care reform. Thank you again for your tireless efforts to address this critical issue.

With kind, personal regards, I am,

Sincerely,



Mark H. Ayers
President

cc: All Members of the House Education and Labor Committee
House Ways and Means Committee
House Energy and Commerce Committee