

October 30, 2009



Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) more than 2 million members, I urge you to vote "yes" to pass the *Affordable Health Care for America Act* (H.R. 3962) when it is considered on the House floor and to oppose all weakening amendments. The bill takes historic steps to ensure that everyone has access to quality, affordable healthcare. SEIU strongly supports this legislation, including the affordability credits for low- and moderate-income families to access the care they need, the public health insurance option to provide more choice and competition in the health insurance market, and the fair and progressive surtax to help pay for healthcare reform.

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Affordability and Adequate Coverage

For the first time under federal law, individuals will be required to purchase health insurance, and we have an obligation to make sure that insurance is affordable and meaningful. We strongly support provisions that limit out-of-pocket expenses and provide affordability credits for working families up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). These provisions are essential to ensure that every man, woman and child in America is guaranteed access to quality, affordable coverage.

Strengthening the safety net is also essential to ensure low-income families have access to care. We support the Medicaid expansion to 150 percent FPL and encourage efforts to minimize the contribution states will be expected to make. SEIU strongly supports the six months extension of Medicaid "fmap" to assist states to maintain coverage for struggling families during this time of high unemployment and economic hardship. In addition, we strongly support provisions that provide additional funding for Puerto Rico and the territories.

We support provisions that ensure legal immigrants are eligible for coverage in the exchange without delay. No person should be prohibited from purchasing coverage at their own expense in the exchange. We urge you to reject proposals that would create additional burdensome documentation requirements that would prevent citizens and legal residents from getting coverage they need.

Financing and Delivery System Reform

SEIU supports the revenue provisions included in H.R. 3962. The surtax on the wealthiest of our society—which if passed, would be levied beginning in 2011—would help shift the financing of healthcare in a more progressive and fair direction. The graduated surcharge would begin to restore tax fairness to levels that were in effect during the 1990s, when our economy prospered. For the first time since the beginning of the 19th century, the majority of America's wealth is held by the top one percent of the population and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. The surtax is one of the fairest ways to help finance healthcare reform based on growing income inequality and tax policy in recent years.

We also strongly endorse the reinvestment of a portion of existing healthcare spending to finance reform, such as adjusting Medicare provider payments to incentivize greater productivity, reduce preventable readmissions and reward care coordination.

Public Insurance Option

We are committed to a public health insurance option because it will provide additional choice and competition in the health insurance market. Offering a public option alongside the best structured affordability provisions will ensure healthcare is more accessible and affordable for working families.

Employer Responsibility

We support the employer responsibility provisions that require employers who do not provide minimum qualified coverage to pay an 8 percent of average wages to support their workers in the exchange. We are opposed to policy options such as the free rider penalty. The erosion of employer-sponsored coverage contributes to the affordability and coverage crises we are trying to fix. Currently, responsible employers are penalized in the market by irresponsible ones who fail to provide affordable and meaningful coverage to workers and their families. As an advocate for low-wage workers, SEIU knows firsthand that there are millions of workers who lack the bargaining power and right to organize to demand that their employer offer qualifying coverage if there is no federal requirement to do so. We are opposed to weakening HIPAA nondiscrimination protections and genetic nondiscrimination protections under the guise of so-called "wellness" programs.

Insurance Reform

This bill includes strong reforms to the insurance market and the creation of insurance exchanges so that consumers will be more secure in their health coverage. Insurers will be prohibited from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions. Insurers will be prevented from selectively refusing to renew coverage. Health insurance companies will no longer be able to charge people different premiums based on their gender, health status or occupation. H.R. 3962 strictly limits premium variation based on age. We are opposed to any amendments that would allow insurers and employers to raise premiums for those who do not comply with wellness prevention programs because they will undermine the important insurance reforms and affordability protections included in this legislation. SEIU strongly supports provisions that allow the exchange to solicit bids and select the highest quality, lowest cost plans, and we urge retention of provisions that allow large employers to have access to the exchange in addition to small employers.

Workforce

SEIU supports provisions in H.R. 3962 which would help create a stable workforce to deliver quality patient care. Researchers project a shortage of more than a million nurses by 2020 so significant federal investment in the training and education of nurses and direct care workers is vital. We support Section 2531 that establishes a grant program under the U.S. Department of Labor that creates career ladders to nursing and increases the capacity of nurse faculty. A steady pipeline of nurses is needed both to address the national shortages that currently exist and to ensure that once reform is enacted there are healthcare professionals to deliver quality care in all regions of the country. We also support increasing investment in direct care jobs as a source for eliminating chronic shortages of nurses and other healthcare professionals and paraprofessionals, while also promoting greater diversity in the healthcare workforce.

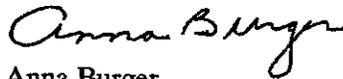
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CLASS Act

SEIU supports provisions to improve long term care for vulnerable populations. We strongly endorse provisions from the Community Living Assistance and Supportive Services (CLASS) Act, which would create a national insurance plan for disabled adults to access assistance services and supports.

I urge you to vote "yes" on the rule to allow consideration of *Affordable Health Care for America Act* (H.R. 3962) on the House floor and to vote "yes" on final passage. SEIU will add votes related to this issue to our Congressional Score Card located on our Web site at www.seiu.org. Should you have any questions, contact Desiree Hoffman, Senior Legislative Advocate, at 202-730-7352 or email at desiree.hoffman@seiu.org, or Josh Nassar, Senior Legislative Advocate at 202-730-7413 or email at josh.nassar@seiu.org.

Sincerely,



Anna Burger
International Secretary-Treasurer

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