

LETTER TO LEAGUE MEMBERS FROM LWVUS PRESIDENT

July 16, 2009

To: Members of the House of Representatives
From: Mary G. Wilson, President
Re: Comprehensive Health Care Reform Legislation

The League of Women Voters welcomes the introduction of America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009 in the House of Representatives and we urge you to support quick action on this essential legislation. We believe that it is imperative for Congress to send real health care reform to the President for his signature as soon as possible.

America is facing a health care crisis caused by a combination of skyrocketing costs and an insurance system that leaves 47 million of us without any coverage. The current health care system is endangering both our economy and our health, and voters have made it clear that they want change. According to a study reported in The New England Journal of Medicine, 70 percent of Americans surveyed believe the health care system needs major changes, if not a complete overhaul.

All Americans must have health care coverage, including the choice of a quality, affordable public insurance plan. It is universal coverage that will determine the humanity of our system. We believe that health care reform legislation must guarantee access to comprehensive and essential benefits to all U.S. residents.

But coverage is not enough. We need to provide for quality and safety in the health care system. We believe that health care legislation must establish a system-wide program to coordinate information, establish best practices and provide consumers the information they need to protect themselves and their families. It is essential that comparative data on treatments, benefits packages and medical outcomes be made publicly available so that individuals can make informed health decisions and so costs can be controlled.

The federal government needs to take additional strong action to reduce the costs of health care for individuals, businesses and communities. As a nation, we are spending \$1 out of every \$6 we earn on health care. Over the last three decades, increases in the amount we spend on health care have consistently risen faster than wages and inflation. If nothing is done to control costs, we could be spending \$3 trillion for health care by 2011 and \$4.2 trillion by 2016.

The League believes that cost containment measures must take place in the context of overall health care reform. We must reduce or eliminate the cost-shifting that currently exists in health care financing and work to streamline the system. Legislation must provide effective cost controls, equitable distribution of services and allow for efficient and economical delivery of care. Offering everyone the choice of a government administered health insurance plan like Medicare that would compete with private health insurance plans will be key.

To achieve this kind of comprehensive, system-wide reform will take a shared effort by citizens and Congress. The League of Women Voters is ready to work with you to reach this goal.