

February 12, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Republican Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Senator Reid, Senator McConnell, and Representative Boehner:

We are writing to ask that you join President Obama for a bipartisan meeting at the Blair House on February 25 to discuss health reform legislation.

We have seen again in recent days that when it comes to health care, the status quo is unsustainable and unacceptable. The proof is right in front of us: just last week, a major insurer, Anthem Blue Cross, announced plans to increase premiums for many of its policyholders in California by as much as 39 percent on March 1.

As the President noted this week, if we don't act on comprehensive health insurance reform, this enormous rate hike will be "just a preview of coming attractions. Premiums will continue to rise for folks with insurance; millions more will lose their coverage altogether; our deficits will continue to grow larger."

Now is the time to act on behalf of the millions of Americans and small businesses who are counting on meaningful health insurance reform. In the last year, there has been an extraordinary effort to craft effective legislation. There have been hundreds of hours of committee hearings and mark-ups in both the House of Representatives and Senate, with nearly all of those sessions televised on C-SPAN. The Senate spent over 160 hours on the Senate floor considering health insurance reform legislation and, for the first time in history, both the House of Representatives and Senate have approved comprehensive health reform legislation. This is the closest our Nation has been to resolving this issue in the nearly 100 years that it has been debated.

The Blair House meeting is the next step in this process. The session will begin at 10:00 a.m. and be broadcast live in its entirety. Although it is impossible to include every House Member or Senator who has played a pivotal role in the health care debate, the President is inviting the most senior House/Senate bipartisan leadership, as well as the chairmen and ranking members of the committees that oversee health insurance reform legislation in both chambers. A complete list of this group is attached. The President would like each of you to designate an additional four Members to attend the meeting and be available to participate. It is also

important that each of you have one staff member specializing in health care policy in the meeting.

We will have a representative from the Office of Management and Budget to provide technical assistance, and hope that representatives from the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation will also be able to attend.

In addition to the President, attending and participating on behalf of the Administration will be the Vice President, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, and Nancy-Ann DeParle, Director of the Office of Health Reform.

The President will offer opening remarks at the beginning of the meeting, followed by remarks from a Republican leader chosen by the Republican leadership and a Democratic leader chosen by the Democratic leadership. The President will then open and moderate discussion on four critical topics: insurance reforms, cost containment, expanding coverage, and the impact health reform legislation will have on deficit reduction.

Since this meeting will be most productive if information is widely available before the meeting, we will post online the text of a proposed health insurance reform package. This legislation would put a stop to insurance company abuses, extend coverage to millions of Americans, get control of skyrocketing premiums and out-of-pocket costs, and reduce the deficit.

It is the President's hope that the Republican congressional leadership will also put forward their own comprehensive bill to achieve those goals and make it available online as well. As the President said earlier this week:

I'm looking forward to a constructive debate with plans that need to be measured against this test: Does it bring down costs for all Americans as well as for the Federal Government, which spends a huge amount on health care? Does it provide adequate protection against abuses by the insurance industry? Does it make coverage affordable and available to the tens of millions of working Americans who don't have it right now? And does it help us get on a path of fiscal sustainability?

These are priorities that we all share, and the President is looking forward to examining with you and your colleagues how we can best achieve the most effective reform possible.

Sincerely,

Rahm Emanuel
Assistant to the President
and Chief of Staff

Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary of Health and Human Services