

CONGRESSMAN FRANK PALLONE, JR.

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PALLONE STATEMENT AT HEALTH HEARING ON HEALTHCARE REFORM PROPOSAL

Washington, D.C. --- U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone Jr., Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, gave the following statement this morning at a hearing on the healthcare reform draft proposal released by the three committees of jurisdiction last week- Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Education and Labor.

"Good morning. Today we are meeting to examine a discussion draft on comprehensive health reform. The Subcommittee will also convene to receive testimony tomorrow and Thursday. In addition, the Full Committee will meet tomorrow morning to hear from the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius.

"Comprehensive health reform is a goal that has eluded reformers, Democrats and Republicans alike, for over a century. As a result, the problems that plague our health care system have continued to grow worse.

"The ranks of the uninsured continue to swell. The cost of insurance and medical care continues to sky rocket. The quality of care delivered becomes more and more erratic.

"After years of failing to address these problems we find ourselves in a situation where our broken health care system is a clear and present danger to the economic health of this nation.

"Government budgets are being overrun by the mounting cost of health care, crowding out funding for other key services. American businesses are disadvantaged as they try to compete in the global marketplace. And American families are being driven into bankruptcy by ballooning medical debt or forgoing critical care altogether. President Obama understands that these problems require urgent action, which is why he has called upon Congress to pass comprehensive health reform legislation this year.

"Health care reform is an issue that generates great interest and controversy. This much we know. And while we may not all yet agree on a common solution, I think we also know that we cannot let this opportunity pass us by.

"Maintaining the status quo and allowing these problems to continue to fester is no longer an option. Nor can we simply resign ourselves to making marginal improvements as we have done in the past. The time for comprehensive reform is upon us and the discussion draft we are reviewing this week is the starting point for that debate.

"The discussion draft envisions a world where every American family has access to affordable and quality health coverage. Those who are currently unable to access coverage through our public programs, employers or the individual market, will now be able to do so through a reformed insurance marketplace that guarantees access, quality and affordability. People who already have health coverage will be able to keep their coverage and their choice of doctors.

"But, health reform isn't just about improving coverage and access; it's also about improving the public health. Too many people are suffering from preventable illnesses and conditions such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, and obesity-related illnesses. Accordingly, we must change the way we think about medical treatment by focusing on preventative care, as well as the quality of care being given. This discussion draft aims to do just that.

"There are a lot of other important details about the discussion draft that I am not mentioning, which I hope will be explored over the course of the next three days. In closing, I want to speak directly to those who will stand in opposition to our efforts. For those who have legitimate concerns with the draft, I urge you to talk to us about your ideas. We want to work with those of you who are truly interested in being constructive participants in enacting health reform this year.

"But for those who stand in opposition simply for opposition's sake, I urge you to rethink your position. After a century of inaction, the American people want to see change. They want to see health reform enacted and we intend to deliver it to them. Thank you."