

**Statement of  
Ralph G. Neas  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Coalition on Health Care  
Before the  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Health  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.  
June 23, 2009**

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I.

Chairmen Waxman and Pallone, (Chairman Emeritus Dingell), Ranking Members Barton and Deal, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on this momentous occasion -- Day One of hearings to discuss the House Tri-Committee Health Care Reform Discussion Draft. We are honored to be here today and heartened by the progress that this joint effort represents. We hope this unprecedented cooperative proposal for health care reform developed by the Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Education and Labor Committees serves as the urgently needed springboard for finally achieving comprehensive and sustainable health care reform.

Like you, the President, and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, we believe that the time for action is now — this year. Reform of America's health care system is a fundamental condition precedent for fixing our nation's faltering economy. The economic crisis facing us cannot be addressed successfully without the simultaneous adoption of a comprehensive, sustainable overhaul of America's health care system. America is on a dangerous path to sharp increases in the costs of health care and the numbers of uninsured Americans, to unsustainable burdens on our economy and on federal and state budgets, and to indefensible, avoidable harm to millions of patients and massive waste from sub-standard and uncoordinated health care.

## II.

For over three decades, the Coalition's founder and President, Dr. Henry E. Simmons, has fought tirelessly for system-wide reforms to control health care costs and to ensure high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans. Dr. Simmons and the Coalition's Executive Vice President and chief policy advisor, Mark A. Goldberg, are here with us today.

The rigorously non-partisan National Coalition on Health Care -- co-chaired by former Governor Robert Ray, a Republican from Iowa, and former Rep. Bob Edgar, a Democrat from Pennsylvania -- was founded in 1990 and is the nation's oldest and broadest alliance of organizations working for comprehensive health care reform. The Coalition's 78 -- and counting -- member organizations include large companies and unions, pension funds, insurers, associations of health care providers, teaching hospitals, faith-based groups, disability and patient advocacy organizations, higher education councils and small business groups. Collectively, these member organizations stand for more than 150 million Americans.

The Coalition's five basic principles for health care reform -- coverage for all, cost containment, improved quality and safety, simplified administration, and equitable financing -- are interdependent. We believe reform must address all of these issues in a systematic way that recognizes their interconnectedness. After more than 18 months of deliberations by our members, the Coalition developed a set of recommendations -- what we have termed specifications for reform -- that are appended to the Coalition's written statement. I would ask

that the full summary of the Coalition's principles and specifications be included for the record along with our complete written statement.

The Coalition's five principles for reform and specifications frame our discussion with you today. Also, it is important to note that the Coalition operates on the basis of consensus among its members. Yesterday, we began an expedited process of reviewing and discussing the provisions and particulars of the Tri-Committee Discussion Draft with our members. As these internal consultations progress, we will be able to provide more detailed views and consensus recommendations regarding optimal formulation of the bill.

However, at this critical juncture, let there be no doubt that the Coalition strongly commends the cross-jurisdictional, collaborative Tri-Committee effort to address the central challenges facing our nation in health care:

- How to slow the growth of health care costs,
- How to extend coverage to the growing number of Americans without health insurance, and
- How to improve the quality of care and the efficiency with which it is delivered.

The Discussion Draft is ambitious in its scope and its recommendations -- and, we think, very appropriately so. We believe that reducing costs while expanding coverage not only can be done, but must be done, and that doing so is essential both to providing health care to all and to revitalizing our Nation's economy. Now is the time to keep what is good and to fix what is broken in our nation's health care system. It is not a time for timid, half-way measures or self-

serving posturing. This is the time to come together to pass sustainable comprehensive reform that sets our nation on a better path: toward affordable, high-quality care for all Americans and fiscal responsibility.

Our members have long believed that the strategy for securing coverage for all Americans can and probably should incorporate a range of mechanisms, including responsibilities for individuals and employers; the expansion of existing public programs, such as Medicaid and Medicare; information and a framework to improve competition among private insurance plans; and the creation of an additional, and carefully designed, public option.

We are pleased that the Discussion Draft reflects an unswerving commitment to covering the uninsured and precisely this sort of pragmatism about how to go about it.

In addition, we would encourage you to consider adding more detail to the definition of the services to be covered in an essential benefits package. Many of our members would want us to note the importance of calibrating the provisions regarding the public option to make sure that it would function, as the drafters clearly intend, on a level playing field with other plans.

We applaud the drafters for including a wide range of measures to improve the efficiency of health care delivery while also enhancing the quality and safety of care and providing support for evidence-based prevention. Escalating health care costs put health coverage out of the financial reach of tens of millions of Americans and their employers. In addition, as the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and the President's Council of Economic Advisors have recently noted,

these surging costs inhibit economic growth, suppress wage increases and living standards, and undermine the competitiveness of American firms in global markets. We would urge the addition to your armamentarium of cost-containment strategies the use of short-term regulatory constraints to slow the pace of increase in the costs of essential coverage.

### III.

The House Tri-Committee Discussion Draft is an excellent beginning and charts a course for enactment of the health care reform that our nation urgently needs. We applaud the Chairmen for their leadership and their deep appreciation for the fact that our present system is both inequitable and unsustainable.

This truly is an extraordinary moment in history. Too much is at stake -- the health and well-being of millions of American families and the future of our Nation's economic and fiscal health -- for us to risk failure due to partisanship. It is only through a commitment to shared responsibility and shared sacrifice that we can rise to meet this once-in-a-generation opportunity to formulate a pragmatic, achievable and uniquely American solution. In order to protect the generations to come, we must work ceaselessly now to enact reform that is at once moral and fiscally sound.

We appreciate this opportunity to offer our initial response to the Discussion Draft and look forward to helping formulate changes to strengthen the proposal before the bill is brought to the floor next month. Again, we and our members thank and commend the Committee and

Subcommittee and your colleagues on the House Ways and Means and Education and Labor  
Committees for the enormous added momentum your efforts have given to the reform process.