

Congressional Hispanic Caucus Calls for Passage of Health Care Reform

Washington, DC – The Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) today called for passage of President Obama's health care reform proposal, saying that it would greatly improve the quality of life for millions of Latinos. The measure is expected to expand coverage to 8.8 million Latinos, or 60% of the currently uninsured Hispanic community.

"With one in three Latinos lacking a steady source of health care, the current system has been devastating to our families and communities," said **Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY), the Chair of the CHC**. "The legislation before Congress offers a historic opportunity to address these problems and make quality, affordable medical care accessible for millions of Latinos."

"This bill is important for all Americans, but it is particularly critical to our Latino communities which have the highest uninsured rate of any racial or ethnic group in the country. The bill provides access to affordable health care to the millions of uninsured Latinos in this country through Medicaid expansion, access to health insurance exchanges, and subsidies to help low and moderate income families," said **Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), the Chair of the CHC Task Force on Health**. "The final Health Reform legislation represents a milestone in our nation's history as we take a historic step toward acknowledging health care as a universal right for everyone."

"We are ready to make the historic vote that will improve the health of all Americans, including Hispanic Americans," said **Rep. Charles A. Gonzalez (D-TX), the First Vice Chair of the CHC**. "While this is not the perfect reform package, it's the necessary step forward that will provide health coverage for the many millions that need it. After we pass this legislation, we will continue to fight for better quality coverage for everyone in America."

"I've spent the past week speaking at length with the President and his staff," said Rep. Luis

Gutierrez (D-IL), the **Chair of the CHC Task Force on Immigration**. “I shared with him that I believed that we could have a victory for every American who deserves affordable, high-quality health care and for the immigrants of our nation. I also told President Obama I would not sacrifice either goal. I believe we have a health care bill I can vote ‘yes’ for, and I believe we have a commitment to move forward on a comprehensive immigration reform package as soon as possible.”

“I am so pleased that the reconciliation bill released today provides fair and just treatment to the 4.4 million Americans living in Puerto Rico and its sister territories, who have been treated unequally under federal health programs for too long,” said **Rep. Pedro Pierluisi (D-Puerto Rico)**. “Today’s bill constitutes a remarkable reversal from where we stood just a few weeks ago. The bill will provide \$6.3 billion in new Medicaid funding for the territories in the form of an estimated 182% increase to their current federal funding caps. This represents nearly a tripling of the total Medicaid funding the territories would receive under current law. In addition, whereas the Senate bill strictly limited how new Medicaid funding could be spent, the reconciliation bill gives Puerto Rico and the other territories flexibility to determine how best to use this funding to expand coverage and improve services. Finally, while the Senate bill excluded the U.S. citizens in the territories from the Health Care Exchange, the bill released today provides our constituents with access to the Exchange and \$1 billion to offer subsidies to individuals and families of modest means who participate in an Exchange. I am so grateful to the leadership and the members of the CHC for their unstinting support for fair treatment for Puerto Rico and the other territories.”

“Now is the time to decide – will we cling to the status quo, or will we vote for change and a new direction for America? Now is the time to put our country back on track, and to do so responsibly, by reducing the deficit as we improve health care for our people,” said **Congressman Xavier Becerra (D-CA), Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus**.

“I will be proud to cast my vote in favor of this bill and look forward to doing the same for comprehensive immigration reform in the near future,” said **Congressman José E. Serrano (D-NY)**. “In passing this bill we are ensuring health coverage for nearly all Americans and adding strength to the financial security of America’s families.”

In addition to expanding coverage, the proposal will improve Latinos’ quality of care. By requiring insurance companies to offer preventive care with no cost-sharing, the President’s proposal would help identify and prevent conditions that Latinos suffer from disproportionately like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

The bill is expected to put an end to a number of unfair practices in the insurance market that are particularly harmful to Latinos. Under the legislation, insurance providers will no longer be allowed to drop coverage of customers when they grow sick, nor will they be able to deny coverage to those with preexisting conditions. Members of the Caucus said that because of these important consumer protections, American families will no longer go bankrupt in the future in order to afford health care coverage.

Members of the Caucus also noted that the legislation makes significant investments to expand community health centers throughout the nation. By directing funding to health care services and for the operation, expansion, and construction of community health centers nationwide, the bill will improve care for all Americans, but be particularly beneficial to Latinos and those living in underserved communities.

Finally, Members of the Caucus praised the legislation for reducing the national deficit. Over the next ten years, the bill is expected to reduce the deficit by \$130 billion and, in the following decade, cut \$1.2 trillion from the deficit.

“Taken together, these reforms constitute a critical step toward enhancing both access and quality of health care for Latinos,” **Velázquez said**. “The CHC calls on all of our colleagues to come together and, at long last, pass this landmark legislation, which will do much good, not only for our community, but for our entire country.”

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The Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) is comprised of Members of Congress of Hispanic descent. Since 1976 the CHC has been addressing the needs of the Hispanic community in all areas of American life. For more information on the CHC, call (202) 225-2410.