February 22, 2006

Citizen’s Health Care Working Group
Seattle Center
305 Harrison Street
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Friends,

Thank you for taking part in today’s important discussion. To make valuable and lasting reforms in our nation’s health care system, your input is essential. The way in which we respond as a community to one another’s health needs says a lot about our priorities. For too long, public discussion has focused on finding quick ways to cut costs across the board. We need to do more than just reduce the final price tag. We must reinvent the system and recognize that cost is forever tied to something else: quality. To succeed, we must engage both elements—cost and quality—at once with skill and sensitivity.

That’s because higher quality care is less expensive. Better outcomes are cheaper than adverse outcomes. This may seem strange—most of us associate high quality with high costs. But the reality of the American health care system does not support this assumption. We spend more than any other country on health care. Yet, millions are still uninsured or underinsured. Much of the excess spending can be attributed to archaic systems, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and dangerous mistakes, causing costs to soar and patient care to suffer.

Real change won’t be easy, but it doesn’t have to wait. I continue to fight in the U.S. Senate for powerful initiatives which begin to address the problems you are discussing today. We must ensure a top-quality health professional workforce, especially in areas where there are significant personnel shortages. We ought to foster widespread implementation of health information technology and support small businesses with real proposals to make offering health insurance more affordable. With each new step, we strive to improve access and reduce the cost of health care for all Americans.

The people of Washington state have a proud history and a bright future. Together, we will be challenged by sudden and tremendous changes in health care—economic, technological, and demographic changes. You are on the front lines, witnessing this
evolution and feeling its consequences everyday. And, that is why your participation today is so valuable. That is why, together, we can make this Working Group a success and transform our health care system.

Sincerely,

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator