



# Reach Out America

P.O. Box 222057, Great Neck, N.Y. 11022

Aug. 15, 2006

Citizens' Health Care Working Group  
Attn: Interim Recommendations  
7201 Wisconsin Ave, Rm. 575  
Bethesda, MD 20814

Enclosed please find Reach Out America's Position Statement on the Interim Recommendations of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group.

Yours truly,

Marge Raphael  
Chair. Social Security/Health Care Committee

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Fran Reid

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Barbara Zeller

## **Reach Out America's Position Statement on the Interim Recommendations of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group**

We offer our own comments below as a set of ideas that we hope you will take into consideration in developing your own responses:

Reach Out America agrees with the picture presented by the Citizens Health Care Working Group of our health care system as "unintelligible for most people." We too share the view that health care in our country has become a "rigid system with a set of ingrained operating procedures that long ago became disconnected from the mission of providing people with humane, respectful and technically excellent health care."

Our country spends nearly two trillion dollars on health each year yet fails to provide health insurance coverage for 46 million people each year. While public budgets in many states and localities are buckling under the burden of health care costs, our health care system continues to provide care of lower quality than many other nations. Eighteen thousand people in our country die unnecessarily each year because of their lack of health insurance coverage.

Reach Out America believes that the American health care system requires fundamental reform. These are the principles that should guide such reform:

- Universal and equitable coverage for all
- Comprehensive benefits and quality health care providing a full range of services effective in preventing illness and improving health
- Affordable costs and equitable financing
- Administrative simplicity and sensibly organized work
- Accountability to the public to be served and to the service providers
- A strong public health system

These principles inform our comments on the interim recommendations of the CHCWG:

**Recommendation 1 and 2. It should be public policy that all Americans have affordable health care.**

We agree strongly. However, this CHCWG recommendation is immediately followed by two qualifiers: a) All American should have access to a set of core health care services. b) Financial assistance will be available to those who need it.

We disagree with both qualifiers. Attempting to identify "core" services apart from other services opens up a set of conflicts and conundrums in deciding which services are "essential" and which are not. A two-tier system would emerge with inevitable discriminatory characteristics. Any system that would require "financial assistance" would introduce means testing, with all its wasteful expenditures in time and money in eligibility determination, fraud investigation, and public assistance grant interviews.

Reach Out America believes that our country needs a universal, publicly financed system of

national health insurance that will make health care available to everyone. We believe that this country has the financial means to do this if existing expenditures are redirected to give priority to patient care and the administrative costs are reduced to the three percent level of our current Medicare system.

### **Recommendation 3. Guarantee financial protection against very high health care costs**

We disagree. A comprehensive system of care which is publicly financed should provide access to the full range of services without any need for special "catastrophic" coverage. Providing ready access to low-cost primary care can reduce the need for high cost acute treatment on an emergency basis. Providing adequate follow-up care can reduce the need for rehospitalization.

### **Recommendation 4. Support integrated community health networks**

We agree. Such networks are an efficient, community-supportive way of providing services.

### **Recommendation 5. Promote efforts to improve quality of care and efficiency**

We agree. We already have a good model for a universal, publicly financed system in many aspects in the work of the health programs of the Veterans Administration. The most effective way to measure quality and eliminate wasteful administrative costs is through the establishment of a universal health care system that is publicly financed.

### **Recommendation 6. Fundamentally restructure the way that palliative care, hospice care and other end-of-life services are financed and provided, so that people living with advanced incurable conditions have increased access to these services in the environment they choose.**

We agree. People need to be treated humanely throughout their lives, including the kind of assistance attendant to end-of-life care.

### **A final recommendation from Reach Out America**

Action by Congress to move toward universal health care is urgently required. The system of employer-provided health insurance is breaking down. The quality of life of the American people is being endangered as health care costs consume more and more of the income of working people. These costs are the single most important reason for personal bankruptcy. Our businesses are increasingly at a disadvantage in competing with those of other industrial countries where the cost of health care is much less and is spread more fairly across the population.

We need not replicate the efforts of the last decade where the Clinton Administration invented whole new structures in proposals to extend health care that went nowhere. Our country already has a working structure that can serve as a foundation for extending health care for all, and that is Medicare. While improvements in Medicare are necessary, particularly with respect to Medicare Part D, we believe that we can begin to extend Medicare to new populations and over a reasonably short time, cover everyone.



**MEMBERSHIP**

Reach Out America meets once a month at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, 48 Shelter Rock Road, Manhasset, NY 11030. There is a charge of \$25.00 a year that provides you the opportunity to be actively involved in local, state and national issues. For further information:

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**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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## HISTORY

“Reach Out America” is an outgrowth of the original “Speak Out America”, a non partisan seminar which took place in May of 2004 drawing over 300 concerned citizens discussing issues of importance to the community. The panels addressed the country’s foreign, domestic and Middle East policies. Speakers included the Honorable Sol Wachtler, former Chief Judge of NY State; The Reverend Mark Lukens, President of the Interfaith Alliance of Long Island and Rabbi Jerome Davidson of Temple Beth El of Great Neck. The organization that emerged from the seminar became “Take Back America”. No longer non partisan, its purpose was to elect the Kerry/Edwards ticket. Among the group’s many activities were creating materials for distribution to the community, phoning, door to door campaigning in contested states and fundraising. A major fundraiser featured Cameron Kerry, the candidate’s brother, which along with several tea and coffee parties, raised in excess of \$100,000 for the presidential campaign



## REACH OUT AMERICA

“Reach Out America” was formed after the 2004 Presidential election. This group had worked together in “Take Back America” and wanted to stay active in addressing the vital issues confronting our nation. With Shirley Romaine and Fran Reid as Co-chairs, “Reach Out America’s” membership continues to grow. The group is actively working to preserve Social Security to lobby for election reform so that every vote is counted, and to prevent the erosion of the separation of church and state. Action calling for an end to the war and the occupation of Iraq is also on our agenda. Our mission spells out our commitment: **“To work with others in social and political action in order to safeguard our Constitutional Rights. Further, we will work to help America find peaceful solutions to world problems while strengthening democracy at home.”**



## CURRENT AGENDA

“Reach Out America’s” current priorities are:

- Social Security/Health Care
- Election Reform
- Separation of Church and State
- War in Iraq

## FUTURE PLANS

- Education
- The Media
- 2006 Election
- Civil Liberties
- Major Outreach Events

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