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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

U.S. House of Representatives
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Washington, DC 20515-6115

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November 10, 2008

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AND CHIEF COUNSEL

The Honorable Barack Obama
The President-elect
The Office of the 2008 Presidential Transition
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Obama:

Congratulations on your decisive victory in the recent election. You have received a clear mandate for moving forward with policies that will improve the lives of every American.

Health care was a critical issue to voters this November. The American people desperately need reform of the patchwork healthcare system that currently fails so many in need of care. As we discussed during the campaign, I am eager to work with you to make this happen, and I appreciate that your transition team has been in contact with my staff to chart the path forward.

We share common ground on key principles for reforming the Nation's healthcare system. This reform is essential for the health of our citizens and for the global competitiveness of our economy.

First, we must seek a path to universal coverage that will provide access for those who do not have it, while protecting the good coverage others currently enjoy. As you know, I have a long history of advocating for universal coverage. Each Congress I introduce a bill to provide universal access to health care. More recently I joined with Senator Kennedy to put forward a framework to cover all Americans through the Medicare for All Act.

I hope, however, that a first step to universal coverage will be covering all children, an issue on which I worked during the last Congress with Senator Clinton. And, of course, Chairman Rangel and I led the effort to craft a bipartisan, robust reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which I believe should be enacted as quickly as possible when the 111th Congress convenes.

Second, while we proceed on a path to universal coverage, we must also address the issue of cost. We need to find ways to increase both the efficiency and the quality of care.

Moving forward to bring health care into the information age will be an important step on the path to that goal. During the 110th Congress, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce passed bipartisan, landmark legislation to enhance the use of information technology in the healthcare sector. The PRO(TECH)T Act would promote greater use of health information technology, such as electronic medical records, to improve the quality of care and reduce costs. This bill would build on and expand privacy protections for information that will flow at higher speeds and in greater quality in an electronic world. Passing this legislation into law during the 111th Congress will be another important step forward.

Third, we must increase competition in the insurance market and provide affordable, accessible options for American families and businesses. We must consider pooling arrangements and reinsurance for catastrophic costs to help improve competition and access. We must guarantee that health insurance does not exclude pre-existing conditions or otherwise limit care for families buying their own insurance. We must also cut waste, fraud, and abuse from the system by ensuring that any Federal dollars spent are to secure care, not simply line the pockets of corporate executives and insurers.

Fourth, we must address the public health infrastructure that undergirds universal coverage. This includes addressing workforce issues such as education and training of health professionals, fostering a healthy environment for children by tackling obesity and tobacco issues, improving access to school-based health care and support services, renewed investment in research and development for cures to chronic and debilitating diseases as well as disease management programs to improve health and outcomes, and addressing health disparities to ensure they are not carried over into a reformed American health system.

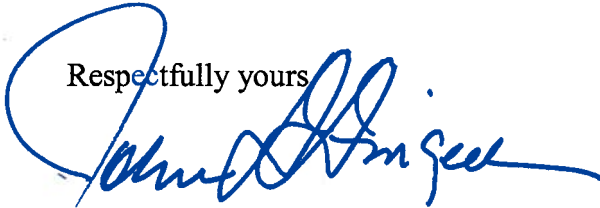
Fifth, a system of universal coverage must provide for the needs of Americans from cradle to grave, for those who are healthy and for those who are sick. This discussion must include a focus on long-term care services that are woefully underfunded, underutilized, and overlooked. We know such services and supports are cost-effective and help Americans with disabilities remain in their homes and communities where they belong.

Finally, we must ensure everyone is invested and has a role in the new system. This means that individuals, small and large employers, providers, insurers, and the State and Federal Governments all must work together to make any system work.

I have served in Congress for more than half a century – long enough to have learned that good ideas, good works, and, most importantly, good results do not materialize from thin air. They come from collaborative thinking. Recognizing political realities that have prevented us from enacting universal health care, I have worked hard to fill gaps and to improve existing healthcare coverage.

Last Tuesday's election brings great optimism about what this Congress and your Administration can and must accomplish to protect the health of Americans. We share the same goals. My years in Congress have taught me how to bridge differences and produce policies all sides can support with pride. We have a lot of work to do, and I very much look forward to a close and productive relationship with you and your Administration.

Respectfully yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John D. Dingell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "D".

JOHN D. DINGELL
CHAIRMAN