

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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Remarks of William Samuel Director of Legislation, AFL-CIO On the Introduction of AmeriCare

July 25, 2006

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I would like to thank Congressman Stark for introducing AmeriCare. This legislation will close the growing gaps in our current health insurance system and provide all Americans with access to affordable, comprehensive, quality health coverage.

Health care ranks among our members' greatest concerns – paying for it, keeping it, worrying about how to cope with medical bills if it is lost. The national dismal trends in health care cost and coverage hit too close to home for working families.

Year after year, health care cost hikes are the number one issue at bargaining for our members. And employers that do the right thing in providing their workers good health coverage are increasingly at a disadvantage with their competitors – both domestic and international.

Employer sponsored coverage has declined dramatically – from 69 percent of firms to just 60 percent over the last 5 years. More employers are shifting costs to workers, making coverage unaffordable to more workers. And the number of uninsured just keeps growing. It is nothing short of a disgrace that 8 out of 10 uninsured are in families with at least one worker.

We have clearly reached a crisis in health care in this country – one that demands bold initiatives rather than proposals that merely push the growing problems onto working families. While the Republicans promote policies that only increase costs for workers and threaten to raise the number of uninsured even further, AmeriCare takes a comprehensive, thoughtful and sensible approach to solving the problems we all know too well.

Experience around the world demonstrates that a social insurance system is the most effective, efficient way to achieve universal coverage, providing comprehensive benefits while controlling costs and driving quality improvements. AmeriCare is built on this principle, with truly shared financing that includes worker premiums as well as an employer role that ensures the coverage is affordable for workers. And in leveling the playing field between employers, AmeriCare assures workers won't have to be victim to employers that skimp on health benefits in order to improve their bottom line.

At a time when Republican leaders have failed to put forth any credible plan for stemming the tide in health care, Congressman Stark's bill answers working families' call for health care for all Americans.