

July 3, 2001

Op-ed by U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky - Universal Health Care

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Last year, I was pleased to join with over twenty of my House colleagues in forming the Universal Health Care Task Force. Under the leadership of its chair, Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, and with my fellow vice-chairs Rep. John Tierney of Massachusetts, Rep. Barbara Lee of California, and Rep. Donna Christiansen of the Virgin Islands, we are committed to working with UHCAN and other grassroots organizations to provide the direction and momentum necessary to win universal health care.

In April, we introduced House Concurrent Resolution 99 (H.Con.Res. 99), which calls on Congress to enact legislation by October 2004 that provides "access to comprehensive health care for all Americans." The resolution lays out our vision of universal coverage, the kind of high-quality health care system that we believe Americans want and need. That vision says that health care must:

- be affordable to individuals and families, businesses and taxpayers and remove financial barriers to needed care;**

- be as cost efficient as possible, spending the maximum amount of dollars on direct patient care;**

- provide comprehensive benefits, including benefits (with full parity) for mental health and long term care services;**

- eliminate disparities in access to quality health care;**

- address the need to have adequate numbers of qualified caregivers, practitioners, and providers, and guarantee timely access to quality care;**

- ensure continuity of coverage and continuity of care;**

- be easy for patients, providers and practitioners to use and reduce paperwork.**

Poll after poll show that Americans are seriously concerned about the need for health care for all. But our vision is not about handing everyone a \$1,000 tax credit or enrolling everyone in a barebones health insurance policy. Those proposals, like the Fair Care for the Uninsured Act sponsored by Representative Dick Armey (R-TX), claim to provide universal coverage, but they fail to meet a single one of the criteria laid out in H.Con.Res. 99.

Our efforts, through the Task Force and through H.Con.Res. 99, are designed to describe what we want, to allow people across the country to participate in charting their health care future and to encourage advocates to open discussions about America's health care with Members of Congress of all political persuasions. Our statement of principles is an important set of guidelines against which to measure pseudosolutions to the problem, such as tax credits. We also hope that it will create the energy around the country necessary to win real universal coverage legislation in Congress by 2004.

Congress will not pass any substantial health care access expansion legislation until it hears a much louder cry for it. H.Con.Res. 99 is a vehicle to give the grassroots the ability to send that message effectively.

The members of the Universal Health Care Task Force have begun discussions with leaders of advocacy groups to create a coordinated strategy around H.Con.Res. 99. This can be an important first step to remedy the illness of health care injustice by ensuring that every person gets comprehensive, affordable and high-quality care.