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TALKING POINTS ON NATIONAL HEALTH CARE REFORM

Prepared for House Democratic Caucus members, July 8, 2009

President Barack Obama is urging Congress to enact sweeping health legislation this year to hold down costs and provide health coverage for 50 million uninsured Americans. The president supports reform that:

- Reduces costs for families, businesses and government;
- Protects people's choice of doctors, hospitals and health plans; and
- Assures affordable, quality health care for all Americans.

Florida House Democrats support health care reform legislation this year that protects what works about health care and fixes what's broken.

Health care reform cannot wait another year. For Florida families, the status quo is unacceptable. Families and small businesses are being crushed by skyrocketing health care costs and they are losing the choices they value most.

Each day:

- Families are forced to choose a different doctor because their employer can no longer afford the old plan. They continue to see their health plan benefits erode because they can't keep up with higher premiums, co-pays and deductibles.
- People decide to skip a doctor's visit or medication that they know they need because they can't afford the payment.
- As health care costs increase, families lose their choice of doctors, hospitals, and insurance plans; their choice of treatments; and the security and stability that comes from knowing that they are covered if anything goes wrong.



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Florida House Democrats say:

- Overhauling the health care system is key to turning around the economy.
- Health care costs are expected to wreak havoc on the federal deficit and state government budgets. The costs severely impact businesses and working Americans. Thus, health care costs must be contained.
- Health care reform is incredibly important for both the American people AND THE American economy. Good health care reform is essentially good economic policy.
- We need a public option because a public entity can deliver health care costs so much more affordably. It is the only real way to lower health care costs.
- Many Republicans oppose health care reform because it will drive a stake through the heart of the Republican Party. Republicans would be hurt politically should President Obama and Democrats in Congress succeed in accomplishing health care reform.
- The public overwhelmingly supports the concept of a public option. Congress should deliver reform---and soon.
- Florida's large population of seniors, its growing roster of unemployed families, and children make health care reform a high priority.
- Health care reform seeks to reign in the cost of prescription drugs, which will free up family budgets to pay for other expenses—and it will free up businesses to focus on other priorities.
- Health care reforms like what President Obama is proposing would make our nation's economy – and our state's businesses --- more competitive in the world economy.



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HOW IT WILL WORK:

President Obama has consistently said that if a family likes what they have, they will be able to keep it under health care reform. Democrats will support health care reform that builds on the existing employer-based system and strengthens it.

Democrats support reform that:

- Assures quality, affordable health care for all Americans.
- Takes on the status quo and makes sure that Americans are not denied coverage because of a pre-existing medical condition.
- Offers insurance security for Americans who lose their job or want to switch jobs.
- Gives Americans who want insurance, but can't afford it, help that will allow them to purchase quality, affordable health care.

What the President has said about:

“Shared Responsibility:”

President Obama is open to the idea of shared responsibility for health care coverage, but he believes that if people are responsible for owning health insurance, reducing the cost of coverage for American families is a necessity.

President Obama believes that if we move towards a system that requires coverage, there must be some kind of waiver for Americans who can't afford the costs and small business that face special challenges in providing coverage for employees.

“Single Payer”

President Obama has said that if we were to start a new health care system from scratch, a single payer system might make sense, but we aren't starting from scratch. While there are problems with the current system, American families



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can't afford a disruption to their current health care coverage, and starting over is not an option.

Paying for Health Care Reform:

In his budget, President Obama put aside a \$635 billion over 10 years as a down payment on health care reform. More than half of that amount comes from raising revenue, by doing things like modestly limiting the tax deductions taken by the wealthiest Americans to the same level it was at the end of the Reagan Administration.

However, the Obama administration says we can also make spending cuts so long as they protect our senior citizens. The President has suggested a series of specific cuts, including:

- Ending overpayments to Medicare Advantage that are a windfall for insurance companies at the expense of the American people.
- Using Medicare reimbursements to reduce preventable hospital readmissions. By changing how Medicare reimburses hospitals, it would discourage the practice of boosting profits at the expense of everyone else.
- Saving billions of dollars by introducing generic biologic drugs into the marketplace. Biologic drugs -- which are usually injectable -- tend to be more complicated than traditional chemical medicines because they are made from living cells. Their generic versions will require a more complicated approval pathway than simpler chemical-based drugs. Biologic medicines are used to treat everything from cancer to autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.
- Saving hundreds of billions by adjusting Medicare payments to reflect new advances and productivity gains in our economy and by reducing payments to hospitals for treating uninsured people as we cover more and more Americans.



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- Saving billions by getting better prices for drugs under Medicare, and another billion by rooting out waste, abuse, and fraud throughout our health care system.
- Altogether, the President has identified about \$950 billion savings – not counting some of the longer-term savings that will occur as a result of reform – taking us almost all the way to covering the full cost of health care reform.

Sources for this document include materials from:

- www.whitehouse.gov
- Organizing For America, A Project of the Democratic National Committee
- Florida House Democratic Office research.

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