



February 22, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of more than 12,700 members of our state employees union, we thank you for your thoughtful leadership during these troubled times. We realize that you inherited an economic situation that our country has not faced since World War II. Your willingness to call upon both political parties to work together to solve the many difficult problems our nation faces is what makes you the right leader for our times.

We agree with your recent health care proposal that protects individuals and small businesses by many measures which include curbing unreasonable insurance rate increases, cracking down on fraud, waste and abuse in Medicaid and Medicare, covering people with pre-existing conditions and prohibiting all annual and lifetime limits. Our hope is that with more people able to afford health care coupled with the proper oversight of insurance companies, everyone from big corporations and state governments to small businesses and individuals will experience the cost effectiveness and quality care that real reform should bring.

As you go forward to help our nation, we ask that you carefully consider who you invite to the process. We want you to work with all members of Congress and others who truly want reform. However, for bipartisanship to truly work, we urge you to not let it become a publicity ploy for aspiring presidential candidates.

I am writing specifically about a February 17, 2010, letter you received from the Governor of our State. Unfortunately, Governor Pawlenty seemed to leave important information out of his letter that could shed a different light on who is really responsible for the positive developments in health care in Minnesota. And, we hope to give insight as to what actions our Governor takes in the name of reform.

The first point to clarify is the following statement, "...in Minnesota, we incentivize public employees to choose high-quality, lower-cost clinics, resulting in only a small premium increases since 2005." **What you should know, Mr. President, is that this change occurred as a settlement result of a 2001 state employees strike, a full year or so before Tim Pawlenty was elected as Governor.** As part of the team that negotiated the strike settlement, I would characterize the program as a cost driven system, which we hope is high quality, but limiting further increases in health care costs was the priority.

Secondly, I would also like to address the idea of purchasing health insurance across state lines. The statement, at first blush, might seem to make sense. But, if we delve deeper into what it means we believe that our Governor is trying his best to carry the water for insurance companies by undermining the mandates that individual states require as part of health insurance coverage. For example, according to the Council for Affordable Health Insurance, Minnesota has approximately 38 insurance benefit mandates and the state of Idaho has 6. This difference means that in Minnesota our insurance covers bone marrow transplants, chemotherapy, cervical and prostate cancer screenings, but in Idaho, insurance companies are not required to cover such tests and treatments.

In addition, there would most likely be a storm of lawsuits brewing over the mandate issue – as to which state dictates what an insurance company provides? If an insurance company is headquartered in Idaho, is it required to provide the 6 mandates in Idaho or the 38 in Minnesota? And what about lowering administrative costs and streamlining records? How will clinics be able to be efficient and cost-effective if different patients have different insurance plans from across the country?

Governor Pawlenty also makes a flawed comparison between purchasing health care premiums and life insurance premiums across state borders – it is not an equitable comparison and a stretch at best.

When citing the need for a 21st Century approach to health care in his letter, our Governor failed to mention *his* 21st Century approach to reform – throw the working poor off the health care rolls.

In Minnesota, we have a system called General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC). It helps low income people get health insurance. Last year, Governor Pawlenty cut the program in order to balance our state budget; yet he did not bother to look at the documented wasteful spending of his own administration to keep GAMC going as he looked for money to reduce the deficit. Just last week, while in Washington, he vetoed a bill that would restore GAMC funding for close to 30,000 people who will be cut off on April 1, 2010. I would venture to say that his imperialistic view of running Minnesota's government is closer to the 19th Century than the 21st.

On a final note, during his latest trip to Washington, our Governor was long on quips and poor jokes, but short on substance. By writing this letter, we are doing our best to provide the substance he lacked. We also think that rather than spend more time away from our state, we urge Governor Pawlenty to sit down with the leaders of our state legislature to solve the economic problems of our state before giving advice to others.

Sincerely,

Jim Monroe
Executive Director
Minnesota Association of Professional Employees

cc: Minnesota Congressional Delegation
Minnesota Senate and House DFL Leadership
David Broder, Washington Post
David Gregory, NBC's Meet the Press