



THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF
NEW YORK

January 13, 2010

To The Honorable Charles Schumer
The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
Mr. Joseph Crowley, Mr. Jerrold Nadler, Mr. Michael McMahon,
Ms. Carolyn Maloney, Mr. Charles Rangel,
Mr. José Serrano, Mr. Eliot Engle, Ms. Nita Lowey, Mr. John Hall,
Mr. Scott Murphy, Mr. Maurice Hinchey

We three bishops of historic communities of faith charged with responsibility for overseeing the ministry of our churches in New York City and other parts of the state of New York write to encourage your participation in the ongoing health care reform debate. We cannot remain silent while large numbers of our brother and sister Americans have died due to lack of health-care coverage while others have been bankrupted by extraordinary health-care costs. The tragic situation that many must choose between medical treatment and basic necessities like food or heat is a problem that is far too common.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's report for the year 2008, 46 million Americans were without health insurance including nearly 20% of persons under the age of 65. In addition, 9.9% of children did not have coverage. With record unemployment and a decline in employment benefits, it is unlikely that the report for 2009 will show an improvement. To be very sure, we can no longer accept an expensive, inefficient health care system that under serves millions of our neighbors.

Inasmuch as care for the physical well-being and respect for the dignity of all persons has always been at the core of Christianity's mission and is the foundation under which many of the medical institutions in America began, we believe it is imperative that we continue Jesus' passion in this regard and his devotion to the plight of society's marginalized people. In ours, the richest nation in history, we must do all we can to ensure that no person must suffer for lack of health care.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares that he has come so that people "may have life, and have it abundantly." Often lost amidst the polarizing debate in Congress and in the media is the reality of suffering people for whom the promise of abundant life may be but an

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empty, pious platitude. Our understanding of scripture, our traditions and reason is that each human life is precious to our God. Given the millions*of persons of sacred worth without adequate health care, we believe that the health care issue in America is a moral issue that cries out for a political solution that is inclusive, available, accessible and accountable.

Accordingly, we urge the members of our communions and all persons of good will to be informed and to be counted and we ask that they contact you. The opportunity for significant health care reform benefitting all Americans is upon us and rests with our elected representatives. We must not fail each other.

Sincerely,

The Rt. Rev. Mark S. Sisk
Diocese of New York

The Rev. Robert A. Rimbo
Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Jeremiah Park
United Methodist Church