



November 5, 2009

(Letter sent to Pennsylvania's U.S. House Delegation)

Dear Representative:

First, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB) is troubled by the incredibly brief period which has been allowed to review and comment on H.R. 3962, the Affordable Healthcare for America Act. While we realize that health care reform discussions and decisions have been occurring for months, rushing legislation of such magnitude from introduction to a vote in so few days cannot be justified. We hope you will convey that sentiment to the U.S. House leadership who decided the timetable.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's concern and experience with health insurance is considerable. PFB's Health Services, the largest association health insurance arrangement in the Commonwealth, has existed for 30 years -- and through an arrangement with Capitol BlueCross and Highmark -- provides quality, affordable coverage for nearly 15,000 farm families and retirees. It is exactly the type of "group purchasing" and "negotiating through strength" program which is often cited as a worthy health care reform goal in Washington.

It is vitally important that federal health care reform does not (intentionally or otherwise) prevent the continuation of options like PFB's Health Services. In the short time available for analysis of H.R. 3962, it has been impossible to make a determination on that critical question.

However, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has drawn other conclusions about the legislation, including:

- The employer mandate and eight (8) percent payroll tax will place an enormous burden on a significant portion of agriculture and its related industry. Although some tax incentives are provided in the legislation, farmers are price-takers, not price-makers; they do not have the option of merely passing along mandated costs.
- There are no allowances for seasonal workers; requiring their coverage would be economically devastating for many farm enterprises.
- Farm Bureau opposes any national health plan or "public option". Its existence would eventually "crowd out" health insurance offered and administered in the private sector.
- Our nation cannot afford the projected costs of H.R. 3962, especially considering the growing deficits and other fiscal calamities with entitlement programs which must be dealt with in the immediate future.

For these and many other reasons, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau opposes H. R. 3962.

For many years, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has been urging improvements in health care and health insurance to reduce costs, expand coverage for the non-insured and prevent unfair requirements on insurance subscribers. Among those measures, Farm Bureau –

- Supports the creation of voluntary regional insurance purchasing cooperatives, subject to state regulation, to expand the availability of insurance coverage.
- Supports additional tort reform; defensive medicine is a major cost driver.
- Supports federal tax policies that encourage individuals to prepare for health care needs
- Supports the promotion of personal wellness, fitness and preventive care as basic health goals.
- Supports efforts to improve health care delivery and foster health care competition.
- Supports a reduction in mandated benefits and believes that group health insurance programs of associations should be exempt from mandates.
- Supports direct government financial assistance for those unable to pay for their own health care.
- Supports government incentives for medical and mental health services in rural areas.
- Supports eliminating the 7.5 percent adjusted gross income threshold so that all medical expenses are deductible.
- Supports expanding tax incentives for health savings accounts (HSAs).
- Recommends a tax deduction for health insurance premiums paid by the self-employed against self-employment taxes.
- Opposes taxes on any agricultural commodity to fund health care programs.
- Supports implementation of a program to prevent or reduce the costly development of health care facilities where the need is not clearly established.
- Supports equitable Medicare payment rates to rural hospitals and physicians.
- Supports enhanced Medicare beneficiary access to tele-health services;
- Supports creation of incentives such as scholarships and loans to students who agree to provide health care services in medically underserved areas.

Throughout years of health care reform discussion in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has repeatedly urged lawmakers to practice the Hippocratic Oath: “*Do No Harm*”. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau asks you to vote against the misguided prescriptions for health care which are included in H.R. 3962, and instead work to advance reforms such as those outlined above.

Sincerely,



Samuel A. Kieffer
National Governmental Relations Director