

January 25, 2006
President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

It was my honor and privilege to join Mrs. Bush as your guest at the 2004 State of the Union address. The experience provided me with a firsthand appreciation of the complexity involved in managing the multitude of issues that face our country. As you prepare to deliver this year's address, I hope you will place vulnerable populations at the forefront of your domestic agenda.



Last fall I assumed the position of president and chief executive officer of The Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA). On behalf of CHA and the health care ministries we represent, I am writing to encourage you to make health care reform a priority both in your State of the Union address and in the policies you promote for the remainder of your presidency.

American health care is among the best in the world, yet continues to be in a state of disrepair. Growing costs make it increasingly difficult for employers to provide coverage, and for patients to afford out-of-pocket expenses. Meanwhile, the number of uninsured continues to rise, representing a threat to individuals and to our nation's security.

Against this backdrop, I believe your leadership as president is needed to unify our country around transforming the health care system. Our nation's faith communities—and in fact a growing segment of the public at large—agree that health care for everyone should be a national priority.

In a recent opinion poll conducted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in conjunction with CHA, 91 percent of respondents said health care should be guaranteed to all children, reflecting similar conclusions from other nationwide polls. Nine in 10 survey respondents said the federal government should ensure that low-income people have health coverage.

We urge you to use the influence of your office to set the stage for real reforms and begin leading the country toward their adoption. It is troubling that the wealthiest nation on earth is home to 46 million people without health insurance. It is also an economic problem, as unmet medical needs keep people from working and growing health expenses force thousands of others into bankruptcy and even poverty.

As we work to build the momentum for a different reality, the Catholic health ministry supports sequential changes and improvements that expand coverage and access for those most in need. As a result, I hope that your administration will put children first and fortify critical safety net programs such as SCHIP and Medicaid.

It is also my hope that the budget you submit to Congress for FY2007 will put in practice the values we embody as a compassionate nation. We clearly possess the resources to ensure that everyone in our nation has access to basic health care. This is especially important for children, and I hope that your budget proposes to expand coverage to this vulnerable population.

I thank you for your kind attention, and for remembering that we are a strong nation with the capacity—and the will power—to make the right choices for one another and for our shared future.

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The Catholic health ministry asks God's blessing on you at this important time in our nation's history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sr. Carol Keehan".

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC
President and Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Health Association

cc: Mrs. Laura Bush
H. James Towey
Roy Ranthum