

# Harry and Louise Are Back — And They Need You



**BY JEFF TIEMAN**  
Mr. Tieman is senior director, Health Reform Initiatives, Catholic Health Association, Washington, D.C.

**R**emember Harry & Louise? They were the TV couple featured in advertisements that helped topple health care reform proposed by the Clinton administration in the early 1990s. The series of commercials were highly effective in worrying the American people about what reform would do to their health care. By fretting over lost benefits and higher costs at their kitchen table, this fictional TV couple changed the dynamics of the debate and kept reform on hold.

This past summer, though, Harry and Louise were back on TV, this time to lament the lack of action that has swelled the ranks of the uninsured and forced small businesses to cut coverage. Their message, spelled out simply in the last line of the commercial: “Whoever the next president is, health care should be at the top of his agenda. Bring everyone to the table and make [reform] happen.”

A coalition in which the Catholic Health

Association is a founding member returned Harry and Louise to the air waves, this time not to support or oppose a specific plan but to call for immediate and substantive action. The 30-second spot ran during both political conventions on cable news networks and during Sunday morning talk shows. Millions of visits were registered to the website [HarryAndLouiseReturn.com](http://HarryAndLouiseReturn.com) during the two weeks the commercial appeared on the air.

CHA joined the Health Care First coalition that sponsored the ads for two reasons. First, we believe the public must be engaged in the health care reform dialogue for it to move forward. Second, Harry and Louise successfully engaged the public with a negative message last time. We were excited by the prospect of reviving them to deliver a positive message — and to convey, if subtly, that they have come to their senses.

“I’m glad to see Harry and Louise are back,



The fictional TV couple Harry and Louise returned to the airwaves to promote health care reform, a reversal in message from their commercials in the 1990s.



and this time on the right side of the issue,” Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., said at a health care rally staged during the Democratic National Convention in Denver this past summer.

Some people, however, were not happy to see Harry and Louise on TV again. Timothy Noah of Slate.com wrote: “I find it hard to forgive these (admittedly fictional) people for showing not the vaguest understanding, much less regret, that they helped bring about the current health care crisis. Nor has the couple any clue about how to fix it.”

Regardless of the opinions, the new commercial has already accomplished one of its signature goals: to catalyze dialogue. Even critical comments are helpful. Divergent viewpoints are being brought to the conversation, which has to happen if we are to harness the demand for reform among the diverse groups that make up the American public.

The Harry and Louise campaign is one effective way we are conveying our message and reminding people that health care must become an urgent national priority. The ad’s presence on TV and the Internet is part of keeping health care on the national radar even as it competes with other critical and time-sensitive issues.

Regardless of who is elected to office in November, Harry and Louise are correct in stressing that everyone must come to the table and make a true attempt at repairing the system. Harry and Louise, however, are not enough. Their voices need to be joined by those from across the country to insist that lawmakers listen to their constituents and take corresponding action.

The Catholic health ministry can play a starring role in this unfolding produc-

**Regardless of the opinions, the new commercial has already accomplished one of its signature goals: to catalyze dialogue. Even critical comments are helpful. Divergent viewpoints are being brought to the conversation, which has to happen if we are to harness the demand for reform among the diverse groups that make up the American public.**

tion. Each of us can inspire and inform others, talk with our elected officials, and make our communities more aware of and engaged in the need for change.

With about 1 million employees across the country, Catholic health ministry can be a powerful and persuasive force.

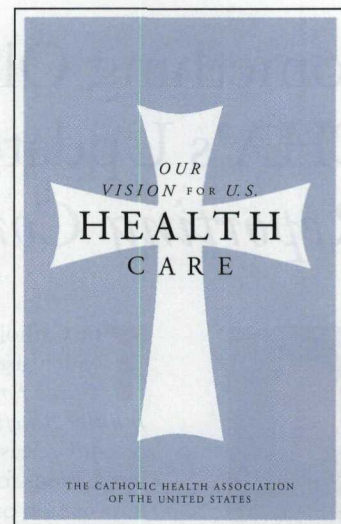
During the next few months, through early 2009, the Health Reform Initiatives committee of CHA will make available resources and launch campaigns to further enhance the reach and resonance of our message. Be on the lookout for those materials and, in the meantime, stay vigilant and vocal.

As we’ve been saying on our CHA Vision posters and elsewhere, *One Voice Can Reform Health Care – Yours.* ■

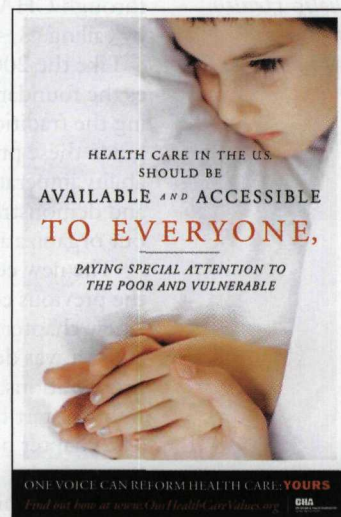


**Comment on this column at [www.chausa.org/hp](http://www.chausa.org/hp).**

## Free Resources for Health Reform



The Vision document is available as a brochure and a PowerPoint presentation for your meetings.



One of six Vision posters to help spread the word.

These and other resources are available at [www.OurHealthCareValues.org](http://www.OurHealthCareValues.org)

**CHA**  
THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
OF THE UNITED STATES