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July 23, 2009

Dear Senator

I am writing to you as the Executive Director of the Mennonite Church USA to inform you about an action taken by the delegate body at our biennial convention held earlier this month in Columbus, Ohio. The attached resolution asks “our members and congregations to urge their congressional representatives to support legislation that would extend access to healthcare to all Americans, particularly the poor and disadvantaged” and commits our church to “work together with others to bring about this result.” I trust that you will be hearing from our members as the resolution is disseminated to our churches, but in the meantime I wanted you to be aware of the fact that we have taken this action.

Mennonite Church is a Christian denomination with 105,000 members, many of whom are your constituents. Mennonites have a long history of involvement in the provision of health care for the needy. In particular, many of our members worked in mental hospitals as conscientious objectors during World War II, and after the war Mennonites went on to establish a number of mental hospitals and to make a major contribution to mental health reform in the United States.

Our commitment to health care for the needy is based in scripture. Indeed, the resolution we adopted this month built on an earlier resolution adopted at our 2005 convention that articulated our theology of health care access. That resolution states: “Because the scriptural test of a just nation is how it treats its weakest members (Micah 6:8, Amos 5:24, Jeremiah 5:26-29), we will be clear and consistent advocates to policymakers on behalf of public health matters and access to healthcare for everyone.” Our witness on the issue of access to health care is also grounded in our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, which states that “We also witness by being ambassadors for Christ, calling the nations (and all persons and institutions) to move toward justice, peace, and compassion for all people.” Finally it is an outworking of the vision statement of our church, “God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.”

We do not as a denomination endorse any particular health reform legislation or approach to health care reform. Our resolution, however, urges consideration of one key principle for reform—priority for access to health care for all, and particularly for the poor and disadvantaged. We urge you also to make this principle your priority as well.

The final clause of our resolution states that “we will pray for healthcare access for Americans across our land, as well as those working on behalf of this issue.” We assure you that our prayers are with you as you consider this momentous and difficult issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Schrag". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Schrag  
Executive Director  
Mennonite Church USA