

## AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT OBAMA AND SENATE MAJORITY LEADER REID

February 4, 2010

Dear Mr. President and Mr. Majority Leader,

Please grow a backbone and enact into law right now your main 2008 campaign pledge: quality, affordable health care for all.

House Democrats did their job by passing an acceptable bill and passing it quickly. And Maryland's two Senators, Barbara Mikulski and Ben Cardin, did their jobs by advocating forcefully for a good Senate bill.

But too many Senate Dems fell down on the job with the result that the Senate ended up passing a bad bill. Worse, Senate Dems are now hesitating to work with the House to finish the job of passing a decent House-Senate compromise.

As for you, Mr. President, with all due respect, we don't need any more pretty speeches. We need you to spur the dysfunctional Senate Democrats to finish the job by twisting their arms out of their sockets (just as LBJ did to pass his big reforms). That means one-on-one meetings jawboning specific Dem Senators, cajoling and threatening them until they vote for the bill.

Further endless consultation with Ben Nelson and Joe Lieberman and further hopeless outreach to an obstructionist GOP is not an option. Delay and delay and delay is exactly what gave the teabaggers enough time to mobilize and spew their lies. Nine months of wrangling over a single bill is exactly why the American people are coming to the conclusion that Democrats are unable to govern. Hence, even the normally sensible voters of Massachusetts elected ex-centerfold Scott Brown to the U.S. Senate.

Senate Dems have the votes to pass tomorrow a good House-Senate compromise by a simple majority vote, either by abolishing the hateful filibuster (the preferred means because then Dems can enact the rest of the President's agenda) or by passing the lousy Senate bill along with a package of House improvements via reconciliation.

The stakes could not be higher. If you fail to pass a good bill now, it would be one of the worst *catastrophes* (the term is considered) in American history. Such a failure would result in:

- **Continued tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths each year** of our fellow Americans who lack insurance coverage or who are denied care by greedy insurance companies. The number of these deaths *each year* dwarfs the number of Americans who died in 9/11 plus in all other terrorist attacks plus in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined.

- **Millions of Americans unnecessarily suffering poor health** because they lack insurance or have bad insurance.
- **The health care sector continuing to gobble up an ever growing share of GDP**, hobbling future economic growth and adding untold billions of dollars to future governmental budget deficits.
- **A profound crisis of confidence in the federal government's ability to solve problems.** How many decades has it been since the federal government – and the Senate in particular – enacted a major progressive reform? Do we no longer live in a democracy where elections have consequences? Or are lawmakers so corrupted by corporate campaign contributions (and by their cronies on K St.) that they can no longer pass laws to solve real problems?
- **Democratic eclipse, GOP ascendancy.** If Dem lawmakers would rather preserve an arcane and laughably undemocratic Senate procedure found nowhere in the Constitution (i.e., the filibuster) than enact their own top legislative priority, registered Independents will conclude that Dems are unable to govern and the Dem base will stay at home rather than support corrupt traitors to the party's ideals. In the short term, this would mean a GOP landslide in the midterm election (as in 1994) and a likely one-term Obama Administration. In the longer term, the Democratic Party could go the way of the Whig Party of the 1850s, which disappeared because of its failure to limit slavery, let alone abolish it. A Democratic Party with an election mandate and majority in Congress yet unwilling to enact legislation to solve the major problems of our time (health care, unstable financial sector, global warming, etc.) is a reform party unable to reform. *Such a party is doomed to extinction*, in which case a far-right GOP would have a free hand to govern the world's only superpower for years to come. [No wonder Europeans now talk openly of the "instability" of the U.S. political system](#), as if we are a third world country.

By contrast, if you do pass a good bill now you will render a huge service to your country -- and make history. You will look like winners who know how to govern and we progressive advocates will validate that, all of which will improve your election prospects in 2010 and beyond.

So, Mr. Majority Leader, stop dithering and kow-towing to Blue Dogs and to insurance industry sell-outs like Nelson and Lieberman -- you don't need their votes to win by simple majority. And Mr. President, stop speechifying and stop prattling about "bipartisanship". Instead, you two must corral right now Senate Dems into one room, lock the door, order out for pizza, and don't let anybody leave until you pass by simple majority a good House-Senate compromise bill.

Sincerely,



Sean R. Dobson  
Executive Director