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**NATION'S LARGEST HEALTH COALITION CALLS FOR
SWEEPING CHANGES IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

(Washington, D.C.) – Alarmed at what it terms “a deepening health care crisis” and dissatisfied with the status quo, the nation's largest, most broadly representative alliance of organizations working for health care reform today called on our nation’s policymakers to dramatically overhaul the health care system.

The National Coalition on Health Care, which includes nearly 100 of America’s largest businesses, unions, provider groups, insurers, pension funds, and consumer and religious organizations, urged comprehensive reforms that would insure all Americans, control rapidly rising health costs, and dramatically improve quality and patient safety.

Henry E. Simmons, M.D., president of the non-partisan Coalition said, “The health care reforms we are recommending go far beyond any proposal now being considered. After a year of study and debate, the Coalition has concluded that incremental strategies will not be sufficient. What we need is action on comprehensive reform, and soon. And it is clear that over the long term, the cost of action is far less than the cost of inaction,” he added.

The Coalition, which collectively represents 150 million Americans, today released specifications for system-wide reforms to help frame a renewed national debate about the health care system and to embolden political leaders to act rapidly regardless of who is elected President or wins control of Congress in November. The Coalition’s report, *Building a Better Health Care System: Specifications for Reform*, calls for:

- Requiring health coverage for all Americans within two to three years after the enactment of legislation.
- Bringing cost increases for health care in line with increases in other parts of the economy within five years.

- Launching a nationwide effort to dramatically improve the quality, safety, and value of care.
- Making the financing of health care more equitable.
- Simplifying and modernizing the administration of health care.

At a press conference on Capitol Hill today, the Coalition warned that, if policymakers fail to act:

- Premiums for family health coverage will exceed \$14,500 in 2006 -- more than double their level in 2001.
- The number of Americans without health insurance will surge to more than 51 million in 2006 -- an increase of more than 10 million since 2001.
- Millions will be unnecessarily injured, and hundreds of thousands of Americans will die each year because of poor quality care.
- Surging health care costs will add trillions of dollars to federal deficits in the coming decades.

According to the Coalition, "The escalation of health care costs is not only a health care issue. It is also a major national economic problem." Soaring health care costs, the new report says, are reducing economic growth and job creation, corporate profits, the global competitiveness of American firms, and the viability of pensions. Health care costs also have become the single most contentious issue in collective bargaining.

"These and other pressures have pushed this unusual alliance of organizations to reach consensus and compromise to make progress," said former Governor Robert D. Ray (R-IA), Co-chairman of the Coalition. "If each of us -- each political leader, each organization, each voter -- holds out only for our ideal, we'll remain deadlocked," he warned.

"The status quo is unacceptable," added Coalition Co-Chairman Paul G. Rogers (D-FL), former U.S. Representative and Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee. "Today's report is politically significant because it shows that there is broad support across most sectors of the economy and society, and across party lines for tough, system-wide reform."

The Coalition's Honorary Co-Chairmen are former Presidents George H.W. Bush, Jimmy Carter, and Gerald R. Ford.

Speakers at today's press event included:

Henry E. Simmons, M.D., President, National Coalition on Health Care
 Former **Gov. Robert D. Ray**, Co-Chairman, NCHC
 Former **U.S. Rep. Paul G. Rogers**, Co-Chairman, NCHC
John Aschenbrenner, President, Insurance and Financial Services, Principal
 Financial Group
John J. Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO

William Novelli, CEO, AARP

James Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, for the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Barbara Ross-Lee, D.O., Chair of the Board of Directors, Association of Academic Health Centers

William J. Grize, President and CEO, Ahold USA

Sean Harrigan, President of the Board, California Public Employees Retirement System

A list of the Coalition members issuing today's report is attached to this press release. Additional information about the Coalition and a copy of the report *Building a Better Health Care System: Specifications for Reform*, can be obtained by visiting the Coalition's Website (www.nchc.org) or by calling (202) 638-7151.
