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HEALTH CARE PROPOSALS IN THE PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

**Statement by Henry E. Simmons, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.P.
President of the National Coalition on Health Care**

We are heartened that President Bush has decided to make health care a priority.

However, **his proposals are not nearly bold enough or broad enough to make much of a dent in the health care crisis we face.**

When 47 million Americans have no health coverage and health insurance premiums have leapt up 87 percent in just the past six years, **we need stronger medicine than what the President has prescribed.**

Providing tax deductions to those who purchase health coverage in the non-group market would do little to help reduce the number of Americans without health insurance.

Most of the uninsured have modest incomes. They either pay no federal income taxes or are in lower tax brackets. A new tax deduction for health insurance premiums would either provide no financial advantage to them -- or an advantage that would be so small that they would be unable to pay for health insurance even with the new deduction.

Limiting the tax exclusion for employer-sponsored coverage would not slow the rate of increase in health care costs themselves and would provide only a small incentive for employees to choose less expensive health plans.

What America needs is a comprehensive approach to health care reform -- a package of policies to assure health coverage to all Americans, slow the rate of increase in costs, and improve the quality and safety of care.

Our Coalition of 75 organizations -- which collectively represent 150 million Americans -- has developed recommendations that would achieve those goals.

The need for major health care reform is urgent.

Just ask the uninsured whether we can afford to wait -- or the 80 percent of Americans who said in recent polls that they are worried about escalating health care costs.

Our Coalition is ready and eager to work with the President and with political leaders in both parties to help frame, and then act on, a national dialogue about how to address the health care crisis with reforms that are commensurate with our problems.

Dr. Simmons will be available for interviews both Tuesday and Wednesday. Please call (202) 638-7151.

The National Coalition on Health Care is the nation's largest, most broadly based, non-profit, non-partisan alliance working for comprehensive health care reform. The Coalition has 75 member organizations including large businesses and labor unions, pension funds, associations of medical organizations, faith-based groups, and patient advocacy organizations which represent more than 150 million Americans.