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RISING TIDE OF UNINSURED THREATENS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The increase in the number of uninsured Americans by 2.2 million people in 2006 reported today by the U.S. Census Bureau clearly shows that we need bold action and leadership to reform our nation's health care system.

Unless we take the necessary actions to stem the rising tide of uninsured people, millions of Americans will be added to the ranks of the 47 million who have no health insurance coverage. The Census Bureau estimates on the uninsured are a year old and do not reflect that the number of people without coverage is likely to grow significantly worse due to rapidly rising health care costs and health insurance premiums. Escalating health insurance premiums are forcing more employers to eliminate their health coverage or pass on more of the costs to employees, making it more difficult for workers to pay for job-based coverage. Moreover, the Census Bureau reports that the vast majority of people losing coverage are coming from middle-income families. Many families, even in higher income categories, say that health insurance costs are not a trivial component of household expenditures.

Additionally, the Census Bureau reported that over 610,000 children lost their health coverage in 2006, and this number will significantly increase unless the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is reauthorized and properly funded in order to enroll currently uninsured children who are eligible for the program.

Recent studies show that uninsured Americans, as well as many insured people, are postponing needed medical care or incurring massive medical debt or going bankrupt due to high out-of-pocket medical expenses. As health care costs have skyrocketed and the share of Americans with adequate health insurance has eroded, health insecurity has become a problem faced by all Americans. Many of us are just one sickness or injury away from financial disaster.

Affordable cost of continued inaction by our political leaders to reform our health care system will result in an even more vicious cycle of more uninsured Americans, higher health care costs and poorer quality of care. Making sure that all Americans have affordable health insurance is the right thing for the United States – and also is the key to controlling health care costs and improving the quality of care. Only comprehensive reform can solve our uninsured crisis.

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, insurers, associations of medical organizations, faith-based groups, patient advocacy organizations, and higher education associations which collectively represent more than 150 million Americans.