



## Health care: Labor, manufacturers working for solutions

By Billy Tauzin and Terry O'Sullivan

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Although it may be hard to believe, the president of the Laborers' International Union of North America and CEO of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America actually see eye-to-eye on an issue of the utmost importance to millions of Americans who currently lack high-quality and affordable healthcare coverage: the need for health care reform.

We share a belief that Congress must act swiftly because too many hard working Americans don't have access to the health care coverage they need.

To help advance health care reform in America, our organizations have partnered with America's Agenda: Health Care for All and launched broad-based health reform campaigns in several states, including Vermont, Illinois, Maine and West Virginia. Through this effort — led by America's Agenda — we have witnessed a historic consensus regarding key elements of a modernized, 21st century U.S. health care system that will meet the needs of families across America.

Since 2000, premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance have been rising four times faster than workers' earnings, which helps explain why Americans are working harder and longer, but are not seeing the results in their paychecks.

For organized labor, health care reform is not just about what it costs, but who is going to pay for it. Union leaders are tired of their members having to pay for those employers who don't provide health insurance for their workers.

Businesses that do provide employee health benefits are burdened with an expense that undermines their competitiveness both at home and in the global marketplace.

For PhRMA, the starting point for re-envisioning America's 21st century health care system is one that puts patients' needs first by assuring all Americans have access to high-quality, affordable health insurance while also preserving incentives for the innovation of new, life-enhancing medicines.

Unfortunately, finding and implementing workable solutions for what ails our health care system is a daunting challenge. That is why the America's Agenda Health Care Education Fund has launched a series of "Summit Conversations" that will highlight key components of a reformed 21st century health care system. The first was held Jan. 28 at the [University of Miami](#).

We know there are important political and policy lessons to be learned from this health reform effort that will help guide enactment and implementation of federal legislation.

For example, research shows that chronic diseases are reaping a terrible toll on the health of Americans and on the costs of our health care system. Nearly 75 percent of all health care spending — and two thirds of the annual growth in health care costs — go toward treating and caring for patients with chronic medical conditions. In Vermont in 2006, America's Agenda worked with legislators to craft a landmark bill that restructured their health care system to not only contain costs for all Vermonters, but to provide quality care (without co-pays or deductibles) for those with chronic illness and extend affordable, high quality coverage to every resident.

According to a recent national survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 61 percent of Americans feel that, given the economic crisis, it is "more important than ever" to enact comprehensive healthcare reform that provides all Americans with access to high-quality, affordable health insurance coverage.

Labor and PhRMA agree, and we will continue to work together to seize upon this unprecedented window of opportunity for health care reform.

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