



HOW TO ENGAGE CALIFORNIANS ON MEANINGFUL HEALTH CARE REFORM

I. SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

- Here in California, our health care system is facing a very real challenge at a critical time in our history. Indeed, **we're at a crossroads** when it comes to assuring quality, affordable health care for millions of our fellow citizens here at home and across the nation, but it's not too late to **get ahead of the problem** by fixing the system where it's broken.
- Right now there are a lot of situations that result in people being without insurance coverage. If you are taking your first job, or if you get divorced, get downsized, work for a small business, or take a part-time job or early retirement, **you are very likely to end up in situations where health care is unavailable** to you. Many people work for employers that do not offer insurance and they cannot afford to buy it on their own.)
- You've probably seen the recent statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and others: Nearly 75 million Americans under 65 went without health insurance at some point during 2001-2002. And at home, we know that 6.7 million Californians find themselves shut out of the system. That's **close to one in every five Californians** – a group equal in size to the combined populations of our three largest cities (Los Angeles, San Diego and San Jose), with most of San Francisco thrown in as well.
- Because we never built a Health Coverage Infrastructure, we're paying the price now. Unlike the modern networks that are essential to our economy and our quality of life – like phone systems and the Internet, water systems, and interstate highways -- with health coverage we're stuck in the 1940s. We still have job-based insurance, which has become an increasingly hit-or-miss, inefficient and unreliable approach. We have the equivalent of scattered wells, individual generators, and county roads but no Health Coverage Infrastructure we can rely on, no system for making sure that people have health coverage. **This affects all**

of us, because the state's health care system only works well when it connects everyone, spreading the risk pool across the broadest possible population.

- Because this challenge affects us all, it's not difficult to see how **working together can only benefit us all**. Research shows that coverage for all citizens of the state -- with everyone paying at least something for care -- would likely **result in lower premiums for all of us**. It helps to think about this problem in terms we can all relate to like, say, constructing a building. **Insured people are like the pillars that hold up the health care system, by paying in, whether a little or a lot, for their care. People without insurance still use the Health Care System, but they are missing pillars because they are not paying in regularly, and not helping support the system. These tens of millions of missing pillars are threatening the stability of the health care system.**
- **We can solve this problem – one manageable step at a time.** Sure, our nation needs to achieve fundamental reform in a health care system that has deep potholes all along the road of life: from first job to retirement. But we need not bite off more than we can chew if we try to fix the system in incremental fashion, taking small but meaningful steps to expand coverage and promote fundamental improvements.

And we can start by reaching out to assist people who are trying to “do right” by their employees and their families, but can't get them into the system: The small business owner who wants to cover her employees but can't afford to do so; the widow who has lost her husband and her health insurance; the family with a first-time worker too old for family coverage and not covered at work. **These are situations where the system is broken,** and leaves people falling through the cracks. We can repair these places, so this doesn't happen. Little by little, we can work together to ensure that California comes up with **solutions that don't leave people in precarious situations.**

- Dealing with this challenge now, rather than letting it get worse, is **the responsible thing to do**. It's what we teach our kids, and it's how we try to handle problems in our day-to-day lives. You don't run away from the problem, you figure out a plan for addressing it and you take it one step at a time. We may not fix the problem you care most about right away, but we'll get there. We may need to fix other pressing aspects of the system, but eventually we'll fix all the ruts in the road to improved health care for California.
- **California has a long history of innovation. We may get problems here first because we're so big and we're in the forefront, but we also have a lot of ingenuity and smart resources to apply to tough problems.** Now is the time to apply that California ingenuity to the health care system through thoughtful planning. Government needs to act as the referee, bringing people to the table, getting business and providers and doctors to come up with a sound plan, and putting in place the steps to get there and the accountability to make it last. If we can get past party rivalries and special interests long enough to invest in the

development of a sensible, market-based approach, we can achieve real health care reform and solve this stubborn problem for generations to come.

II. SOME GOOD MESSENGERS

- **Doctors**, especially ER doctors, who can advance the message of prevention and bring authoritative, front-line experience in health care, prove to be very effective messengers.
- **Small business owners** discussing the need for affordable insurance options are also effective and credible because the solution is market-based and because they are unexpected advocates perceived as ordinary, hard working, and concerned about employees.
- Spokespeople from the **Centers for Disease Control** or other authoritative body are effective in framing a message about health interdependence, which allows people to see how their own health is connected to the health of others, and in advancing the related idea of cost prevention.
- Representatives of **other functioning infrastructures**, such as utilities, or innovators who have improved on existing systems, like the Internet.