

November 20, 2006

Kirsten Gillibrand
Gillibrand for Congress
514 Warren Street
Hudson, NY 12534

Dear Kirsten:

Congratulations on your stunning win! We look forward to working with you as our new U.S. representative.

We are writing as members of the Healthcare Committee of the Coalition for Democracy of Central New York. We voted for you in the election, and some of us worked hard to get you elected.

Our committee came together out of concern for the state of our healthcare system--an issue we know you put at the center of your campaign. In September, we invited residents of Delaware and Otsego Counties to come to a Healthcare Speakout to voice their concerns about our healthcare system. In response, people poured out their stories: Some lack health insurance altogether, others forego care because of high premiums and co-pays or because basic needs like long-term care, dental and mental health care aren't covered. People complained bitterly about the mountains of insurance paperwork and the resulting confusion. The list of problems was huge, some leading to tragic consequences. (A summary of comments from the Speakout is enclosed.)

In the weeks and months since, we have made a study of possible reforms for our failing healthcare system. As you know, the U.S. leaves 47 million people uninsured. Our patchwork system of employer-based health insurance forces people to scramble for coverage every time they change jobs or move. And yet, we in the U.S. pay about twice as much for this healthcare as our neighbors in Canada. What's more, our system puts American industry at a growing competitive disadvantage. U.S. automakers say healthcare costs for U.S. workers amount to some \$1,500 per car – money they don't have to spend in countries with national health insurance.

After our study, the Healthcare Committee agreed that piecemeal reforms will not solve our healthcare crisis. We have agreed that we all want to work for a national healthcare system that is simple, portable, publicly funded, and covers everyone.

Support for this kind of national insurance is growing. On October 11, for example, the Ulster County legislature voted by a margin of 28-2 (including 12 Republicans) in support of "comprehensive, affordable high-quality health care through a single-payer financing mechanism for all Americans." A recent survey of New Yorkers found nearly half support replacing private insurance with universal public insurance. (The next most popular proposal, for mandating employer coverage, garnered only 35% support.)

In the past, many elected officials have said that while they supported universal public insurance, it simply wasn't politically viable. We think times have changed. What isn't viable today is trying to apply band-aids to extend the life of our complex, broken down healthcare system. Instead, we need an overhaul. We need a proven, simple solution that has already been adopted by most of the industrialized world.

We are writing to urge you to take leadership for a universal national healthcare system, and to offer you our support in doing so. Would you be interested in creating a citizens' advisory committee on healthcare reform? If so, we would be honored to participate. If you sign on to a bill to create a national healthcare system that is simple, portable, publicly funded, and covers everyone, we will do everything we can to organize in our area for it.

We'd be happy to discuss this issue with you or your staff. Please call Michael Kaufman in Bovina Center, NY, at 607-832-4447, or email Laura McClure at lauramcclure@earthlink.net.

Thanks so much!

Sincerely,