

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7012

April 27, 2009

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Republican Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell:

As health insurance costs and unemployment both soar, so do the number of Americans who cannot get the care they need to stay healthy, get better or support their loved ones. We have an urgent and overdue responsibility to reverse that trajectory, and time is not on our side.

In the coming weeks and months, it is my greatest hope that Republicans will decide to work with Democrats to respond to this emergency and help us fashion comprehensive, bipartisan health reform legislation. I know that we will disagree at times, but I welcome an open and honest debate about how to lower health care costs, expand access and improve the quality of care. I welcome a dialogue about how to prevent disease, reduce health disparities, and encourage early detection and effective treatments that save lives.

But above all, we must discuss how to help struggling Americans, not drown in distractions and distortions – or be sidetracked by squabbles about arcane Senate procedure, as some in your party seem intent to do. The costs of inaction are too great for us to lose focus. Nearly 46 million Americans – including 15 percent of your constituents in Kentucky – have no health insurance, and the problem grows worse by the day. In Nevada, more than one out of three people under the age of 65 went without health insurance during 2007 and 2008 – and more than three-quarters of them went without health care for six months or longer.

In order for this bipartisan process to take root, Republicans must demonstrate a sincere interest in legislating. Rather than just saying no, you must be willing to offer concrete and constructive proposals. We cannot afford more of the obstructionist tactics that have denied or delayed Congress' efforts to address so many of the critical challenges facing this nation.

To the millions of Americans without health care, this is a concrete and critical crisis that affects children, families and small businesses every single day. It is about the parent who cannot take a child to the dentist because insurance is prohibitively expensive. It is about the small business that had to lay off employees because it couldn't afford skyrocketing health care premiums. Last week we learned that six in 10 families put off necessary medical care because it simply costs too much.

Make no mistake – we are determined to reform health care this year. Our strong preference is

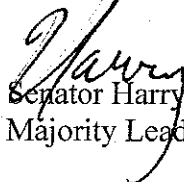
to do so by working alongside you and your caucus. The health of our citizens and our economy are at stake; neither will be able to recover if we do not.

Democrats believe all Americans deserve high quality and affordable health care. We believe in protecting existing coverage when it is good, improving it when it is not, and guaranteeing health care for the millions – including nine million children – who have none.

We look forward to hearing your ideas and working with you. The budget we will vote on this week gives us nearly six months to work together toward a comprehensive reform bill. Let's use that time to work together in our common interest rather than against each other and against the interests of the American people.

I hope your conference will recognize that this issue is too important to be manipulated for political purposes. There is a seat for you at the table; we hope you take it.

Sincerely,



Senator Harry Reid  
Majority Leader