



NEWS RELEASE

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Statement Regarding New Census Estimates of Uninsured in Utah

Salt Lake City-The federal government announced today that the number of Americans *under age 65* living without health insurance increased slightly from 2007 (17.1%) to 2008 (17.3%) , leaving more than 45 million people *under age 65* in the U.S. without any health coverage in 2008. The increase would have been much worse, were it not for public programs like Medicaid and CHIP. Between 2007 and 2008 enrollment in Medicaid shot up by 1.1% in the U.S. Over the same period, participation in job-based coverage declined by 1%.

These issues look very different in Utah. According to the latest statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau 362,000 Utahns under age 65 went uninsured for all of 2008 (14.3%). This is .6% higher than the uninsured rate for people under age 65 in 2007 (13.7%). From 2007 to 2008 participation in Utah Medicaid declined sharply from 9.8% to 7.0% (*under investigation*), and job-based coverage in Utah increased by 2.8%. This is certainly impressive and perhaps related to Utah's success in attracting larger employers to the state. Due to their ability to self-insure and share risk, large employers are very likely to offer job-based coverage. This significant increase in job-based coverage in Utah doesn't tell us about the quality, affordability, or scope of coverage offered in today's workplace.

Of course, these figures do not reflect the impact of the recession and rising unemployment on health insurance and Medicaid coverage rates. Based on these factors, the Center on Budget and Policy today projected that the the number of uninsured in the US will likely climb toward the 50 million mark.

Utah and the nation's uninsured rates are unacceptably high and moving in the wrong direction. The uninsured are our family members, friends, neighbors and fellow community members who are left to pray they won't get sick or injured and are just one health crisis away from financial ruin. It is for them, for the growing number of middle class Utahns who stand to lose their coverage, and for the small businesses demanding relief from rising costs, that we must enact comprehensive reforms *this year*.

As the number of people without health coverage continues to grow, placing increased demand on strained state Medicaid budgets, the health reform debate moves into high gear. In his potentially game-changing address to a joint session of Congress last night, President Obama made crystal clear his intentions to achieve a bipartisan, fiscally sustainable approach to comprehensive health reform. The Utah Health Policy Project came away with newfound hope for bipartisan solutions: Since the start of this grueling process, there's nothing we've wanted more than bipartisan engagement and fresh ideas from both sides of the aisle—especially

around cost containment and malpractice reform. Last night it was confirmed: These are President Obama's intentions and hopefully they will set the tone for a more civil process moving forward.

All across the Beehive state men and women from all walks of life are expressing concern about our broken health care system and what must be done to fix it. Reforming our health care system will take reasoned thinking, true bipartisan engagement, and decisive action. The Utah Health Policy Project is committed to advancing health reform here in Utah and nationwide.

- Judi Hilman, Executive Director, Utah Health Policy Project