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BOWIE, MD - Marylanders concerned about rising health care costs and unsatisfied with the current system of care attended a town hall meeting last night in Bowie hosted by Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) on the need for health care reform. During the meeting, Rep. Hoyer listened to numerous personal stories, took questions and asked citizens to join him in supporting national efforts to enact comprehensive health care reform this year.

“Our community, state and country are filled with stories of people who have had to sacrifice health care due to rapidly increasing costs, families who are uninsured or underinsured, or businesses that had to cut jobs because they can't afford to pay the premiums on their employees' health insurance,” **stated Rep. Hoyer.** “We can't afford to wait any longer for health reform; the cost of delay is too great. The time to act is now, and I am calling on all Marylanders who want to improve access to affordable health care to help Congress pass comprehensive reform this year.”

The skyrocketing cost of health care is squeezing Maryland families, burdening businesses and represents one of the greatest threats to America's future economic growth and long-term fiscal stability. Over the past eight years, Marylanders have seen their health insurance premiums increase by 64.1% while wages during that period only grew by 21.4%. [1] Without reform, the health insurance premiums of Maryland families will increase from 4.7% of their income to 9.1% by 2016. [2]

The problem of the uninsured, and its impact on the entire health care system, also continues to grow. The federal government estimates that over 45 million individuals lacked health insurance coverage of any kind during 2008. In Maryland the number of uninsured has grown to 769,007-13.8% of the state's population. [3] Approximately \$56 billion in uncompensated care for the uninsured is absorbed annually by the health system, driving up the cost of insurance for everyone.

Reforming the nation's health care system to lower costs, improve quality, increase coverage, and preserve patient choice of plan and doctors is a top priority for Congress and President Barack Obama. The economic downturn, with more people losing their jobs and health care and businesses struggling under the growing cost of employee coverage, has increased the demand for action to help the nation recover and rebuild with a more efficient, less costly system of care.

“The economic recession has only made a bad situation worse, exposing the weaknesses of a system that is inefficient, unaffordable, and out of reach for far too many Americans,” **stated Rep. Hoyer.**

“America's economic recovery and global competitiveness depend on lowering the costs

for American businesses and families, and ensuring greater access to quality, affordable health care."

"Reform, however, does not mean fixing the parts of health care that aren't broken,"
added Rep. Hoyer.

"We need to build upon the current system of employer-sponsored care, with a system that provides patients their choice of insurance coverage and their choice of doctors. In other words, if you like what you have, you should be able to keep it."

Congress has already acted this year to strengthen health coverage for lower income children and for workers who have lost their jobs during the economic recession. As one of its first acts of the year, Congress reauthorized the State's Children Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to expand coverage to 11 million children, including 150,000 in Maryland. And in the face of a recession, with hundreds of thousands of Americans losing their jobs and their health insurance every month, Congress passed an economic recovery plan that provided relief to states to help them provide Medicaid services and made available temporary subsidies to help families maintain their health coverage through the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA)

[1] *Premiums vs. Paychecks: Maryland*. Families USA. (September 2008)

[1] Axeen, S. & Carter, E. *The Cost of Doing Nothing: Why the Cost of Failing to Fix our Health System is Greater than the Cost of Reform*. New America Foundation. (November 2008)

[1] *Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population, states (2006-2007), U.S. (2007)*, Kaiser Family Foundation, (September 2008)