

Testimony of Gloria Johnson
President of the Coalition of Labor Union Women
for the Finance Committee
United States Senate
on the Financing Provision
of the Administration's Health Security Act
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My name is Gloria Johnson. I am President of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), the nation's only organization of trade union women. CLUW is an organization of 20,000 members from 75 affiliated chapters, representing 7.5 million women in unions from diverse geographic, industrial and occupational backgrounds. Since its inception in 1974, CLUW has been a strong voice on issues ranging from reproductive rights and affirmative action, to family leave and national health care reform.

The Coalition of Labor Union Women applauds the courage and commitment of President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton to take on the issue of health care reform. Thanks in large part to their leadership, we now have an historic opportunity to enact a national health care plan that will guarantee everyone in this country access to high quality, affordable and comprehensive health care benefits.

The Coalition of Labor Union Women is on record in support of a single-payer approach to health care reform. We have endorsed and strongly support the American Health Security Act (H.R. 1200 and S. 491) introduced by Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN). CLUW believes that ultimately the United States will have to move to a single-payer system in order to solve the many fundamental problems we face in our health delivery system. That being said, CLUW is committed to passage of health care reform that meets the principles of a single-payer system and serves the needs of working women and their families. On close examination, the Administration's Health Security Act, meets several of CLUW's basic principles for reform.

One of these key principles is universal access and we commend President Clinton's commitment to providing universal coverage by 1998. No other health reform proposal under consideration -- other than single-payer -- comes close to achieving this important goal.

Currently 15 million American women have no health insurance and nine million children are uninsured. Together, women and children comprise over two-thirds of the 37 million Americans without coverage. All too often jobs that are typically "women's work" like food service, clerical or retail jobs have little or no health coverage. Women also make up two-thirds of the part-time workforce and most part-time jobs provide no health

TICT 0010003

benefits. Women, particularly working women, will benefit disproportionately from the inclusion of universal coverage in the Clinton bill.

Strong cost containment is a second principle by which CLUW evaluates any health reform legislation. The Administration's bill effectively puts the breaks on spiraling health care costs through statutory limits on the annual increase in insurance premiums. This single feature of the Clinton bill would likely save working women and men and all consumers billions of dollars every year.

Comprehensive benefits, including the full range of women's health care needs, is a crucial provision of the health reform package. We applaud the Clinton plan for guaranteeing a uniform, national benefit package that mirrors some of the best private health plans currently available. Better still, the Administration's plan emphasizes preventive care services designed to keep Americans healthy rather than treat them only after they become ill.

Delivery of routine mammograms, pap smears, pre- and post-natal health care top the list of preventative measures that, if available to all women, could dramatically improve women's health and save lives. This year, 44,000 women will die of breast cancer; 13,200 of these deaths could have been prevented by early detection through mammograms and early treatment. Nine out of 10 deaths from cervical cancer could be prevented by early detection through regular pap smears. Similarly, 25% of all pregnant women do not receive adequate prenatal care, a major cause of low birth weight in infants.

The Administration's Health Security Act goes a long way to address women's health care needs. The standard benefit package combined with routine physical examinations, preventative screenings and laboratory tests would provide millions of American women with basic care that is currently out of reach. In the area of family planning, the plan would offer the full range of reproductive health services, including abortions.

Under the Clinton plan, health security would become a reality for the nation's 65 million children. The standard benefit package covers children for well-baby and well-child check-ups, routine immunizations, and dental and vision care up to age 18. Fully funding the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women and Children (WIC) will help meet the nutritional needs of low-income women and children. Together, these benefits would enhance not only the health of millions of children, but also the peace of mind of their parents.

The Clinton Administration has displayed foresight and leadership by introducing a bill that acknowledges that chronic

care needs are as important as acute care. The creation of a long-term home and community-based care program for Americans of all ages takes the crucial first step of meeting the chronic care needs that particularly burden our elderly. A new prescription drug benefit for the elderly and a commitment to mental health coverage are additional elements of the expansion of coverage many Americans would achieve under the President's plan.

The financing of health care reform may be the most difficult aspect of developing a plan. Yet, when it comes to fairness and equity, it is also the single most important component of any reform package. CLUW believes that health care reform must be financed in a progressive manner based on ability to pay. To that end, we have consistently supported income taxes as the preferable funding mechanism for the nation's health care program. The Administration plan's reliance on flat premiums and excise taxes is a matter of much concern to the working women of CLUW. Consumer excise taxes -- whether broad-based value added taxes or narrow tobacco taxes such as those in the Administration's proposal -- are regressive, costing those with the least the greatest share of their income. Unfortunately, working women would bear a disproportionate burden. We would like to see the new health care program improve rather than exacerbate this workplace inequity and hope that this is achieved as health reform moves through Congress.

America's health care system is in critical condition and is in urgent need of reform. President Clinton has taken an admirable first step by introducing legislation that will address many of the most serious problems which exist in our current system. CLUW applauds the Administration's efforts on three of our most important principles for health care reform: universal coverage, comprehensive benefits and cost control.

Thank you.