



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Opening Statement
Markup of H.R. 3200, America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009
Committee on Education and Labor
July 15, 2009

Thank you Chairman Miller. And thank you Ranking Member Kline.

Chairman Miller, I want to begin by commending you and your staff for all the hard work you have done in pursuit of the laudable goal of making quality and affordable health care available to all Americans, regardless of their income or place of residence.

The bill introduced yesterday represents an important step forward in this vital effort. I think we all agree, however, that this legislation is a starting point, not a finished product. Over the coming days, we will have ample opportunity to refine the bill so that it achieves its worthy objectives.

Although I recognize that this process is ongoing and fluid, I would be remiss if I did not express my concern with certain provisions in the bill that fall within this Committee's jurisdiction. The primary source of my unease is the fact that residents of the territories are excluded from Division A of the legislation, the stated purpose of which is to provide Americans with "affordable health care choices." Division A establishes a national health care Exchange in

2013. Although it is not entirely clear from the text of the legislation whether qualifying individuals and small employers from the territories are eligible to acquire insurance from the national Exchange, it is clear that residents of the territories are not eligible for the affordability credits available to their fellow citizens in the states. At best, then, my low-income constituents are included in the Exchange in theory, but excluded in fact, since many of them will not be able to afford insurance on the Exchange without the federal credits. I would note that the Senate HELP bill does make Americans in the territories eligible for these credits.

Last week, the other territory delegates and I sent a letter to President Obama, arguing that the moral and public policy arguments in favor of full inclusion of the territories in national health care reform are compelling. Mr. Chairman: I would ask that this letter be made part of the record. This call for health care parity for the territories has been echoed by scores of respected individuals and organizations, among them AARP; Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Paterson of New York; the Tri-Caucus, and many members of this Committee. President Obama himself has repeatedly pledged to seek equal treatment for the territories under all federal health care programs. Yet, despite the justice of this cause and the support it has garnered, the bill before us would create a bold and brilliant new mechanism—the Exchange—but effectively exclude Americans in the territories from its benefits.

I respectfully submit that, working together, we can clarify and strengthen certain provisions in the bill pertaining to the territories. Tomorrow, in an effort to facilitate and memorialize our commitment to this process, Congressman Sablan and I will offer an amendment that will add to the bill a provision expressing the sense of Congress that H.R. 3200 must be strengthened to

meaningfully address the health care needs of the 4.5 million Americans living in the territories. I hope all members of the Committee will join us in supporting this amendment and that you will work with us to ensure that the legislation ultimately approved by this chamber makes this aspiration a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.