

Claudia Lennhoff, CCHCC Executive Director
Statement for Press Conference to Launch CCHCC's Campaign for the American Dream
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Introduction

Good afternoon. My name is Claudia Lennhoff and I'm the Executive Director of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers.

We at Health Care Consumers are very excited to publicly launch our Campaign for the American Dream today, and we thank you for being here with us.

Our Campaign for the American Dream is a local grassroots organizing effort to support the growing nation-wide "American Dream" movement and its 10 principles to get our nation's economy and democracy back on track, so that all Americans can live a better, healthier life.

CCHCC has become a proud partner and member of the national American Dream Movement and we will carry out our work for this movement through our Campaign for the American Dream.

Before I tell you about our Campaign, I first want to tell you about the national American Dream Movement.

About the American Dream Movement

The American Dream movement is a national organizing effort dedicated to changing our nation's economy, infrastructure, and democratic process in order to advance justice, opportunity, fairness, and democracy for all. The American Dream movement was first organized by dozens of established issue-based organizations that came together across their various issue areas to fight against the disastrous budget cuts being proposed in Congress, and to put forward alternative plans and legislation that would create jobs, income security, health care for all, and strengthen the democratic process for voters in the U.S.

These national organizations have come to recognize that all of our fates, the issues we care about and need to fight for, are deeply intertwined. And the challenges that we all face, politically, legislatively, and in terms of economy and Congress's efforts to address the budget deficit, will require that build our power by building our numbers.

I have been a community organizer for many years, and have hoped for a movement like this for many years, but had never seen it until now – this is a conscious national effort to build a grassroots nationwide movement to turn our country around and to create a legislative, economic and ethical foundation for the common good, for the possibility of security for all the people of our great nation.

Some of the noteworthy organizations that are partners in this movement and that helped start it include several that CCHCC has worked with throughout the decades, including:

- Economic Policy Institute
- Center for Economic and Policy Research
- The Strengthen Social Security coalition

- United for a Fair Economy
- AFSCME
- Planned Parenthood
- Sierra Club
- And many other venerable organizations.

The preamble to the “Contract for the American Dream” states:

“We, the American people, promise to defend and advance a simple ideal: liberty and justice... for all. Americans who are willing to work hard and play by the rules should be able to find a decent job, get a good home in a strong community, retire with dignity and give their kids a better life. Every one of us – rich, poor or in-between, regardless of skin color or birthplace, no matter their sexual orientation or gender – has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That is our covenant, our compact, our contract with one another. It is a promise we can fulfill – but only by working together.”

This national movement has a platform of ten major areas of focus that are necessary to get the U.S. economy back on track, in order to give all Americans a chance at the American Dream. These steps form the basis for the “Contract for the American Dream,” which Health Care Consumers has endorsed, along with almost 700 of our members that we spoke with over the last three weeks.

I want to take a moment now to review the 10 areas outlined in the Contract for the American Dream, and in doing so, show how many of the important issue areas are intertwined.

The Contract for the American Dream:

1. INVEST IN OUR COUNTRY’S INFRASTRUCTURE. Rebuild our crumbling bridges, dams, levees, ports, water and sewer lines, railways, roads and public transit. We must invest in high-speed Internet and a modern, energy-saving electric grid. These investments will create good jobs and rebuild the U.S. To help finance these projects, we need national and state infrastructure banks.

2. CREATE 21ST-CENTURY ENERGY JOBS. We should invest in American businesses that can power our country with innovative technologies like wind turbines, solar panels, geothermal systems, hybrid and electric cars, and next-generation batteries. And we should put Americans to work making our homes and buildings energy efficient. We can create good, green jobs in the U.S., address the climate crisis, and build the clean energy economy.

3. INVEST IN PUBLIC EDUCATION. We should provide universal access to early childhood education, make school funding equitable, invest in high-quality teachers, and build safe, well-equipped school buildings for our students. A high-quality education system, from universal preschool to vocational training and affordable higher education, is critical for our future and can create badly needed jobs now.

4. OFFER MEDICARE FOR ALL. We should expand Medicare so it’s available to all Americans, and reform it to provide even more cost-effective, quality care. The Affordable Care Act is a good start and we must implement it – but it’s not enough. We can save trillions of dollars by joining every other industrialized country – paying much less for health care while getting the same or better results.

5. MAKE WORK PAY. Americans have a right to fair minimum and living wages, to organize and collectively bargain, to enjoy equal opportunity and to earn equal pay for equal work. Corporate assaults on these rights bring down wages and benefits for all of us. They must be outlawed.

6. SECURE SOCIAL SECURITY. Keep Social Security sound, and strengthen the retirement, disability, and survivors' protections Americans earn through their hard work. Pay for it by removing the cap on the Social Security tax, so that upper income people pay into Social Security on all they make, just like the rest of us.

7. RETURN TO FAIRER TAX RATES. End, once and for all, the Bush-era tax giveaways for the rich, which the rest of us – or our kids – must pay eventually. Also, we must outlaw corporate tax havens and tax breaks for shipping jobs overseas. Lastly, with millionaires and billionaires taking a growing share of our country's wealth, we should add new tax brackets for those making more than \$1 million each year.

8. END THE WARS AND INVEST AT HOME. Our troops have done everything that's been asked of them, and it's time to bring them home to good jobs here. We're sending \$3 billion each week overseas that we should be investing to rebuild our country.

9. TAX WALL STREET SPECULATION. A tiny fee of 1/20th of 1% on each Wall Street trade would raise tens of billions of dollars annually with little impact on actual investment. This would reduce speculation, "flash trading," and outrageous bankers' bonuses – and we'd have a lot more money to spend on Main Street job creation.

10. STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY. We need clean, fair elections – where no one's right to vote can be taken away, and where money doesn't buy you your own member of Congress. We must ban anonymous political influence, slam shut the lobbyists' revolving door in D.C. and publicly finance elections. Immigrants who want to join in our democracy deserve a clear path to citizenship. We must stop giving corporations the rights of people when it comes to our elections. And we must ensure our judiciary's respect for the Constitution. Together, we will reclaim our democracy to get our country back on track.

CCHCC's Campaign for the American Dream:

Our Campaign for the American Dream is our grassroots community organizing effort to bring east central Illinois residents into the national movement for the American Dream.

Our Campaign for the American Dream will issue calls to action to the public and to concerned community members to advocate their support or opposition to specific legislative initiatives that help advance the causes laid out in the Contract for the American Dream.

We are already off to a great start. As Jen said, we have already spoken directly to about 700 Health Care Consumers members who agreed to sign on to our Campaign and who have agreed to participate in the first actions of our new Campaign, which Jen will tell you about after you hear from our other speakers. We want to build our numbers into the thousands.

With this Campaign, when we fight to protect Social Security, Veterans Benefits, Medicare, and Medicaid against the threatened cuts that are part of the budget deficit reduction efforts, we know

that when hundreds of local residents take action to tell Congress that we're opposed to those cuts, we are helping to increase the numbers of Americans all over the country who likewise are calling on their elected officials.

With this Campaign, when we fight for legislation that will create jobs, tax Wall Street speculation, end tax loopholes, reform health care in our nation, and end our current wars, we know that we are not alone in calling on Congress to do so.

Our pledge to anyone who joins our Campaign for the American Dream is that when we issue calls to action, and you participate, yours will not be a voice in the wilderness. Your voice, your action, your participation, will be part of a national, mass, coordinated, disciplined action – the kind of mass action that has so far kept Social Security off the Congressional chopping block. We have seen the power of this kind of grassroots mass movement, and our Campaign for the American Dream will strengthen that power across all the issue areas that need public support.

With this Campaign, we know that we are doing our part in a national effort to help set our country on a better course, to create the possibility for a new and better deal, for the American dream, for all people of this nation, and the people in our community. I hope you will join us!