



## Champaign County Health Care Consumers



# Campaign for the American Dream

**“I have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.”**

*- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963 March on Washington*

September 1, 2011

Dear Friends,

Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC) needs your involvement and support as we launch a new campaign – a broad-based, multi-issue, principled Campaign for the American Dream.

This new CCHCC Campaign is born from our efforts over the past few years of fighting to protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid – especially in recent months, with the disastrous Congressional efforts to “fix” the nation’s budget deficit.

Thanks to all of you who participated in our calls to action, we won a brief reprieve by keeping Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid off the chopping block. But the fight to protect our most basic and important social programs is far from over, and the outcome of the recent struggles showed us that we need to do far more than just “play defense” to prevent cuts – **we need to organize to advance an agenda that serves the greater good and that makes the American Dream a possibility once again!**

There is a new and growing national movement – the movement to rebuild the American Dream – and in order to advance this movement and realize its goals, it will take all of us, all around the nation. CCHCC wants to do our part to organize East Central Illinois and our thousands of members as part of this national movement.

Please read below to learn how CCHCC’s Campaign for the American Dream will engage and connect local residents into this growing national movement for the American Dream and how you can get involved!

### **Background:**

#### ***The federal budget deficit “compromise” and the need for a new national movement***

Over the past six years or more, CCHCC has organized to protect and strengthen Social Security against various legislative attempts to privatize the program or cut its benefits. In 2005, we fought to protect Social Security against the privatization efforts of the Bush administration. More recently, in 2010 and 2011, we have had to fight to protect Social Security against efforts to cut the program as part of the national “budget deficit reduction” efforts, even though Social Security does not contribute one cent to the national deficit (*because it is a separate fund; and in fact, the federal government has borrowed money from the Social Security fund*).

The budget deficit reduction efforts have not only targeted Social Security, but also Medicare and Medicaid, so we have had to expand our advocacy efforts to protect all of these programs. These uniquely American social programs have protected millions of people against the ravages of poverty and created a better standard of living. We issued calls to action and thousands of you responded. We had meetings with Senator Dick Durbin, and Representative Jan Schakowsky, both of Illinois, who served on the President’s bi-partisan National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility, and we delivered our collective message to each of them, and to other legislators.

## **The budget deficit “compromise”**

After a very difficult spring and summer, the national budget deficit reduction efforts finally culminated in a disastrous, absurdly unbalanced and dangerous piece of legislation. On August 2, 2011, President Obama signed into law a “compromise” bill, passed by both the Senate and House, that reduced the federal deficit, avoided immediate defaulting on what the government has spent, and allowed the President to raise the debt ceiling. This last-minute compromise was developed behind closed doors, providing no transparency to the American public. The text of the Budget Control Act of 2011 was not released to the public until it was introduced on the House floor for a vote.

## **The creation of this new law ensures that the fight for Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid is far from over.**

The Budget Control Act of 2011 provides two phases of spending cuts (*and with no guaranteed revenue increases*):

- \$1 trillion in cuts over 10 years, with more than half coming from non-defense discretionary spending programs, including funding for: Meals On Wheels, Head Start and K-12 education, domestic violence prevention, job training, and other vital programs and services.
- The remainder of cuts (*at least \$1.5 trillion*) will be left for the Super Committee, composed of 12 members of Congress, to determine and propose to Congress by November 23, 2011.

It has been made clear by President Obama and others that everything is on the table, including Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. If the Super Committee fails in developing the proposal or getting Congress to pass it with a majority vote by December 23, 2011, this would trigger subsequent action including a push for a balanced-budget amendment. If that fails to happen, devastating across-the-board spending cuts would be implemented.

*“The deal to raise the debt ceiling is a recipe to raid Social Security, and harm the economic security of American workers and their families... We object to the proposed super Committee of Congress, which can recommend changes to Social Security that will have to be considered on a fast-track basis, without amendment and without the opportunity for unlimited debate in the Senate.”*

- Nancy Altman, co-chair of the Strengthen Social Security Campaign

## **We won a short reprieve for Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid**

The overwhelming responses to CCHCC’s Calls To Action to protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid over the summer helped to keep these vital social programs from being immediately cut, as you joined millions across the country fighting to protect these programs. Unfortunately, our elected officials have made cuts to other very important programs in the first phase of this legislation. Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid could be next and we must fight to protect our earned benefits!

We are deeply unhappy with this legislation. We believe that it was the wrong “solution” to the problem. Not only will we need to fight to protect the programs that were spared in the first round, we will need to fight to get back the funding for the “discretionary” programs that are now facing budget cuts. This “budget” bill is not balanced in any way -- it is all cuts on the expense side, and no income increases. That is not balanced, and it will have to be fixed, somehow, some way. **But it also points to a larger problem – the erosion of the legislative desire to protect the future of our nation’s populace, the future of the American Dream.**

## **Time For A Movement**

We cannot wait for bad legislation to be enacted through the Super Committee, Congress, or the White House. We cannot stand by and wait, only to react to, unbalanced “solutions.” We have a unique chance as caring and concerned citizens to join together in our communities, our states, and across our country to put forward a different vision for our nation’s future. We will of course fight to protect our vital social

programs against the threatened cuts, but, as long as we have to fight, we want the struggle to be about something bigger, something better, something more fundamental – we want to organize to rebuild and advance the American Dream.

### **The movement for the American Dream**

Individuals – like Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Diane Archer (*founder of the Medicare Rights Center*) – and organizations – including the Strengthen Social Security Coalition, United for a Fair Economy, and the Center for Economic and Policy Research – have united together to further a goal for comprehensive change through ten simple principles, in what they have developed into the **Contract for the American Dream** (*please see the last page of this newsletter for the full text of the Contract*). The Contract includes protecting and expanding Social Security and Medicare, but it also goes far beyond that, to include principles such as: investing in our nation’s infrastructure and public education, Medicare for all, fair minimum wage and fairer tax rates, ending wars and protecting veterans, and ways to strengthen democracy for the people, among others. The preamble to the Contract begins like this:

“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.”

CCHCC is launching our **Campaign for the American Dream** to add our voices to this national grassroots movement. We are tired of “playing defense.” **If we have to fight, then we don’t just want to fight *against* something, but *for* something.** Please see the last page of this newsletter to read the ten principles that create the foundation for this movement.

**If you believe in what we are working towards, please help us with this new Campaign. We need your involvement, financial support, and actions to strengthen our Campaign and this movement.**

### **How You Can Help**

There are many ways you can join CCHCC’s Campaign for the American Dream. Please see our **enclosed Pledge Sheet** for specific ways, including: signing on to the Contract for the American Dream, coming with us to present a letter and the Contract with local signatures to our elected officials this fall, spreading information about the Campaign with you family, friends, neighbors and coworkers, and making a financial contribution to help our Campaign for the American Dream.

In order to build this Campaign, CCHCC will be calling thousands of our supporters through our Annual Phonathon during the last week of September and first week of October to ask them to join and support this Campaign. *You can help save us a phone call by filling out the enclosed pledge sheet and sending it back to us within the next couple of weeks.*

We hope you are as excited about the Campaign as we are, and we look forward to working with you to protect the American Dream. **As always, thank you for your support and involvement!**

Sincerely,

Claudia Lennhoff, *CCHCC Executive Director*

---

**Champaign County Health Care Consumers**

44 East Main Street, Suite 208 ❖ Champaign, IL 61820

(217) 352-6533 ❖ [cchcc@healthcareconsumers.org](mailto:cchcc@healthcareconsumers.org) ❖ [www.healthcareconsumers.org](http://www.healthcareconsumers.org)



# CONTRACT FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM

"I HAVE A DREAM. IT IS A DREAM DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE AMERICAN DREAM."

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963 March on Washington

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.

Today, the American Dream is under threat. Our veterans are coming home to few jobs and little hope on the home front. Our young people are graduating off a cliff, burdened by heavy debt, into the worst job market in half a century. The big banks that American taxpayers bailed out won't cut homeowners a break. Our firefighters, nurses, cops and teachers – America's everyday heroes – are being thrown out onto the street. We believe:

**AMERICA IS NOT BROKE.** America is rich – still the wealthiest nation ever. But too many at the top are grabbing the gains. No person or corporation should be allowed to take from America while giving little or nothing back. The super-rich who got tax breaks and bailouts should now pay full taxes – and help create jobs here, not overseas. *Those who do well in America should do well by America.*

**AMERICANS NEED JOBS, NOT CUTS.** Many of our best workers are sitting idle, while the work of rebuilding America goes undone. Together, we must rebuild our country, reinvest in our people and jump-start the industries of the future. Millions of jobless Americans would love the opportunity to become working, tax-paying members of their communities again. *We have a jobs crisis, not a deficit crisis.*

To produce this Contract for the American Dream, 131,203 Americans came together online and in their communities. We wrote and rated 25,904 ideas. Together, we identified the 10 most critical steps to get our economy back on track and restore the American Dream:

- 
- ★ **1. INVEST IN AMERICA'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 America. 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 America, 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 America.
  - ★ **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.
-