

## Letter from President Andy Stern to SEIU Members: Where Do We Go From Here?

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A little over a year ago, you stood up and showed a nation that Yes, We Can. You knocked on doors, picked up phones, wrote your friends and family and neighbors and helped ring in a resounding victory. It was a win not just for a candidate, but for a people. For a country. For a promise of a better future for all of our kids and grandkids and generations to come.

And after that bright and shining day in November, you hung in there. At a time when people usually pack up, go home, and play the spectator sport of complaining about the system, you got up each and every day and did things both heroic and small to make sure that this time, we didn't leave change to chance.

For nearly a century, Presidents and congressional leaders have debated how to fix our health insurance system. It has become a given that we can and must do better as a nation. But as surely as each generation has tried, each time, politics, special interests and scare tactics have blocked progress and made us come to believe we can't: We can't change, we can't make our country better – plain and simple, we just can't.

I am writing to you today because I believe this is the moment when we must stand as one and say enough.

We talked to more than 200,000 of our sisters and brothers all around the country as part of a Town Hall-style telephone call last week to talk about your questions, your concerns and your frustrations about what is happening in Washington with health insurance reform.

Cynthia from Maryland was worried about her health benefits being taxed.

Maria in California didn't understand why the public option might be off the table.

Gerry from West Virginia wanted to know if he would be able to afford his health coverage.

One thing was clear: When SEIU stands up for affordable care every American can count on, we stand 2.2 million strong and ready to fight for the change our families, friends and neighbors; our patients and our nation need.

But at the very moment that we saw real and meaningful changes within our grasp, one Senator came forward to say "no we can't." He can't let the Senate have an up-or-down vote on health insurance reform.

And the result of this Senator saying "we can't?" The public option is declared impossible. Americans cannot purchase Medicare at an earlier age. The health insurance reform effort we have needed for a century is at risk.

SEIU does not accept that this monumental effort - that this reform that is so necessary to the health and wellbeing of our economy, our families and our future - can be over without a fight. A fight to make it work for you and your families.

Last night, we held a meeting with your International Executive Board - leaders from across the country. Leaders who know you, who understand what you are going through, and above all else, who believe that every one of you deserves a chance to weigh in on our next steps.

We talked about everything that makes this reform meaningful:

- The 30 million more people who will have healthcare they can count on;
- The people who will no longer lose their coverage if they get sick;
- All of us who no longer have to worry about being denied coverage because of pre-existing conditions;
- Women who will no longer be discriminated against just because of their gender.

But we also recognized, that like you, we have concerns. And while it is not entirely clear what the Senate bill will look like, it is becoming clearer that:

- For many people, care will still be too expensive to afford.
- Some of you would face an additional burden because your health insurance benefits would be taxed.
- And the best way we saw possible to hold insurance companies accountable was no longer an option.

So we asked ourselves - and we are asking you - the most critical question we have of this entire debate: where do we go from here?

We know we will fight. We will continue to fight for everything we know is important. We will fight to make care **affordable**. We will fight for real **health insurance reforms**. We will fight for **employers to provide their employees with coverage**. And, we will fight to **pay for all of it responsibly without a tax on your benefits**.

But we aren't the only ones who must fight.

President Obama must remember his own words from the campaign. His call of "Yes We Can" was not just to us, not just to the millions of people who voted for him, but to himself. We all stood shoulder to shoulder with the President during his hard fought campaign. And, we will continue to stand with him but he must fight for the reform we all know is possible. He must fight for Cynthia, Maria, and Gerry – for every American.

Our challenge to you, to the President, to the Senate and to the House of Representatives is to fight. Now, more than ever, all of us must stand up, remember what health insurance reform is all about, and fight like hell to deliver real and meaningful reform to the American people.

In Solidarity,

Andy Stern

