

***Statement of Sidney Wolfe, M.D., Acting President of Public Citizen and Director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group***

Today's testimony by Dr. David Himmelstein of Physicians for a National Health Program before the House Subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is a breakthrough for supporters of the kind of health care system that benefits everyone. Lawmakers should take his message seriously – if not because a single-payer plan is the only system that would cover all Americans, then because it would save taxpayers \$400 billion annually.

Until today, Congress has excluded single-payer advocates from nearly 20 hearings on health reform held this year. During this time, President Obama has suggested that single-payer is off the table. However, after the 77-member Congressional Progressive Caucus' April 2 affirmation to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Harry Reid that the caucus "prefers a single-payer approach to health care reform," we are being included today in the conversation.

Most physicians support a single-payer system – a reality that should not be surprising since a majority of the American public supports the creation of a national health insurance program funded by taxes. The asymmetrical influence of lobbyists representing the interests of insurance and drug companies may have been enough to keep this majority voice out of the discussion in Washington until now, but the true benefits for the public of a single-payer system speak louder than even the most belligerent corporate spin.

Under a single-payer system, doctors, hospitals and other health care providers are paid from a single fund administered by the government, which eliminates the wasteful spending and high administrative costs of private insurance, saving almost \$400 billion annually. This is enough to provide every American with high-quality care, including those who currently have insurance but still cannot afford medications and treatment.

"[A] single-payer reform would make universal, comprehensive coverage affordable by diverting hundreds of billions of dollars from bureaucracy to patient care," says Himmelstein in his testimony today. "Lesser reforms – even those that include a public plan option – cannot realize such savings. While reforms that maintain a major role for private insurers may be politically attractive, they are economically and medically nonsensical."

In health care, if in nothing else, let sense prevail over nonsense in Washington.