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Sept. 3, 2009

Chairman Jim Greer
Republican Party of Florida
420 E. Jefferson Street
PO Box 311
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Dear Chairman Greer:

On behalf of nearly 3 million AARP members throughout Florida, I am pleased to learn that the Republican Party of Florida is strongly committed to protecting seniors and their health care.

AARP believes that fixing our broken health system is not a Republican or Democratic issue – it is an American issue. If older Floridians can count on the support of the Republican Party as well as that of Democrats and independents, then nothing can stand in the way of achieving meaningful health reform this year that helps Floridians of all generations.

However, we write to address some misconceptions that may arise from the new advertisements featuring national Republican Party Chairman Michael Steele now airing in Florida, and in an e-mail from you expanding on Chairman Steele's comments.

First, we are concerned to note that your e-mail suggests that changes to Medicare proposed in national health-reform legislation would cut over \$500 billion from Medicare.

You seem to have omitted the \$311.8 billion that would be plowed back into Medicare to pay doctors more to provide health coverage, close the infamous Medicare Part D coverage gap or "doughnut hole," and eliminate copayments and deductibles for preventive screenings for prostate cancer, osteoporosis and other diseases affecting older people. The real savings to Medicare total approximately \$227 billion over 10 years, or about 3 percent of all Medicare spending. These savings come exclusively from reducing payments to Medicare providers and creating efficiencies – there are no reductions targeting Medicare beneficiaries.

Your e-mail also doesn't mention that health-reform bills would extend Medicare's solvency by five years – a critical issue for older Floridians. Many of our members are concerned that Medicare's trustees report that the program will begin paying out more than it brings in by 2017.

We were surprised to hear that Florida Republicans, known for strong fiscal conservatism, believe Medicare's future costs cannot be reduced by 3 percent over 10 years without grievously hurting older Americans. This program will expend about \$7.1 trillion over this period. Surely it would be possible to achieve some efficiencies, wring out some waste and encourage some cost savings by providers without hurting beneficiaries.

Your e-mail also suggests that health-reform legislation would create government boards that would get between seniors and their doctors. AARP knows you will be relieved to learn that no such provision exists in current health-reform proposals. Yet we see no call

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in your e-mail for an end to health insurers' interference, in which private insurers' bureaucrats routinely override doctors' decisions about what care their patients need.

Next, your e-mail reflects your concern that a government "comparative effectiveness research commission" would limit treatments for patients based on age. Again, you will be relieved to know that the proposed commission would do no such thing. Instead, this commission would provide doctors and patients the same kind of information on the effectiveness of treatments that consumers now receive from Consumer Reports, which is famous for helping consumers learn which products deliver the best value for their dollar. Why shouldn't doctors and patients have better access to data on what treatments work best, so they can make informed decisions on care?

In addition, your e-mail says that ending overpayments to Medicare Advantage would force these plans to drop coverage for seniors in Florida. As you are aware, taxpayers pay Medicare Advantage plans 14 percent more than traditional Medicare. AARP's position is that those extra dollars should go to patient care, not insurance-company profits. Surely it is reasonable to ask executives of Medicare Advantage plans to use their private-sector expertise to deliver care at costs equal to those achieved by a government-run health program. If they can't achieve this goal, we must ask: Why are taxpayers so handsomely compensating them? We would also ask why such plans are developing a reputation for denying needed care to beneficiaries, and why their sales representatives are becoming known for deceptive sales practices. Medicare Advantage can play an important role in health care, but reform is needed.

We hasten to add that AARP has not endorsed any specific health-reform legislation now before Congress. Ample room exists for honest disagreement on these proposals. Yet on such a critical issue, there should be little or no room for misstatements by either proponents or opponents of health reform that cloud this important debate with confusion.

The risk of creating confusion is unfortunately very real. We have actually encountered AARP members at Town Halls and other events who are worried that government "death panels" might deny them life-saving care, or even that government wants to encourage older people to submit to euthanasia. A broad range of observers now agree these charges are poisonous nonsense.

In this regard, we are glad to see by your e-mail that you have committed Florida Republicans to supporting appropriate end-of-life decision-making by older people. Even though current Senate health-reform proposals would no longer allow doctors to be compensated by Medicare for helping older Americans understand end-of-life care choices in voluntary discussions, it is nevertheless important for all of us to encourage Floridians to have frank, in-depth discussions with doctors and loved ones about end-of-life choices. I speak from painful family experience. Only by doing so can we be sure that older people will be able to influence decisions made at the end of their lives. AARP applauds the leadership of Republican leaders such as Georgia's Sen. Johnny Isakson and Florida's own U.S. Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite on this important issue.

Finally, we see no mention in your e-mail of the 600,000 Floridians age 50-64 who have no health coverage. Making affordable, quality coverage available to these older Floridians, as current health-reform proposals would do, is very important to AARP, as we're sure it is to you as well. For millions of other older Floridians, health-reform legislation would forbid insurers to deny coverage for pre-existing conditions, stop insurers from dropping coverage if your care becomes too costly, and allow you to renew

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your policy if you've paid your premiums, even if you get sick. As the Republican Party of Florida has committed itself to work on behalf of seniors, we look forward to your advocacy on their behalf.

Floridians age 50+ have waited many decades for Washington to come to grips with this very complex, difficult issue. Now we are on the cusp of action. Floridians of all generations need their leaders to put aside their differences and work together to achieve common-sense solutions for health reform. AARP stands ready, as always, to work closely with you to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori K. Parham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lori Parham
State Director
AARP Florida