

June 30, 2009

President Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I want to commend you for bringing America to the table in the effort to reform our health care system. Health care is a shared responsibility, and we cannot move forward until all elements of our society fully embrace that principle.

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), representing one million workers in the retail sector, is closely attuned to the health care needs of working people, as well as the financial obligations of companies that provide health care benefits and the competitive pressures they face in the marketplace.

When Walmart announced its support of an employer mandate today, I received the news with interest—and a great deal of skepticism. As a company that has had a significant role in fueling this nation's health care crisis, I have serious questions about Walmart's commitment to playing a constructive role in fashioning reform that, in fact, provides quality affordable care for all.

► In terms of shared responsibility, is Walmart prepared to accept responsibility for funding a meaningful portion of their employees', and their employees' dependents', health care costs? Is Walmart prepared to step up to the current average employer premium contribution levels for employer-based health insurance that are at least 80 percent of the cost of individual coverage and 75 percent of family coverage?

► More than sixty percent of retail jobs are part time. Is Walmart prepared to provide health care coverage for all part-time workers and their dependents, with employer contribution levels that are at least proportional to the number of hours worked?

► What does Walmart mean when it says that "any alternative to an employer mandate should not create barriers to hiring entry-level employees"? Does this mean entry-level workers are going to fall through the cracks when it comes to affordable, quality health care coverage?

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I urge you not to applaud Walmart's announcement until the company can provide satisfactory answers to these and other important questions.

Tremendous job growth will occur in the retail sector in the next decade. How we ultimately reform health care will determine whether these jobs will allow workers to raise a family and fully participate in the American economy or whether they will be marginalized and have to work two and three jobs to survive. The retail companies that employ UFCW members understand shared responsibility through hard work at the negotiating table and being actively engaged on health care reform issues for a number of years. This joint labor management work includes policy formulation and crafting health plans that address health issues like chronic disease and preventative care have been impressive.

I believe we can achieve meaningful health care reform this year that will benefit our entire nation. You can count on the UFCW's unceasing support in this effort.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph T. Hansen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

International President