Michigan Chamber of Commerce Opposes 'Blank Check' Healthcare Ballot Proposal

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The Michigan Chamber of Commerce today announced its opposition to the state health coverage mandate that may find its way to the November 2008 ballot and constitutionally require the Legislature to design and pass a universal health care system. The Michigan Chamber cited serious concerns with the wide open and undefined language contained in the proposal and the fact that Michigan job providers and taxpayers would need to write a blank check to pay for associated costs.

The ballot proposal currently being circulated would constitutionally require the Legislature to "pass laws to make sure that every Michigan resident has affordable and comprehensive health care coverage through a fair and cost effective financing system." To date, ballot circulators claim to have collected 100,000 of the 380,000 signatures needed to place the question on the November ballot.

"Although the idea of affordable and comprehensive health care for everyone is a laudable goal, this proposal will inevitably mean different things to different people because the language is extremely broad and undefined," said Wendy Block. "For example, to some, 'comprehensive' may mean that they are able to access their family doctor or local emergency room but, to others, this may mean they are also able to get elective cosmetic surgery."

"The vague wording of this proposal, if passed, will trigger years of litigation," noted Jim Holcomb, Michigan Chamber Vice President of Business Advocacy & Associate General Counsel. "As a result, the courts -- not legislators -- will ultimately be writing these laws and the meaning of these laws would be subject to change over time as different courts alter the meaning of the various definitions."

"Another major flaw of this proposal is that it fails to identify the cost of this government mandate or funding mechanism," said Rich Studley, Executive Vice President for the Michigan Chamber. "This is really the constitutional equivalent of a blank check for health care.

"It is difficult to imagine how this 'goal' could be achieved under the state's current health care financing system without a significant tax increase -- or without moving Michigan in the direction of a single-payer state," Studley added.

"This proposal sounds nice on its surface. However, we are confident that once voters are educated about the dangers of the proposal and the negative impact it could have on their pocketbooks, they will wisely decide that it's the wrong prescription for Michigan," Block concluded.

The Michigan Chamber is a statewide business organization which represents more than 7,100 employers, trade associations and local chambers of commerce. The Michigan Chamber was established in 1959 to be an advocate for Michigan's job providers in the legislative, political and legal process.

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