

## Stated Clerk issues statement on current health care debate

### *“Reforming our health care system cannot wait”*

LOUISVILLE — The Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, has issued the following statement in light of the national attention on health care reform:

The current public debate about health care has led several people to ask what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has said about this issue.

The 218th General Assembly (2008) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following resolution (<http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=1833>) to appropriate committee chairs in the United States Congress:

*Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us to God, healed all kinds of sickness (Mt. 4:23, par) as a sign of God’s rule. Isaiah speaks God’s word to say “No more shall there be ... an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime” (Isa. 65:20a). We, as Reformed Christians, bear witness to Jesus Christ in word, but also in deed. As followers of our Great Physician Jesus, we have a moral imperative to work to assure that everyone has full access to health care.*

*Our nation is in a crisis in health care, which presents an unprecedented opportunity for our nation to provide health care affordable for all. In this country there is a baby born every fifty-one seconds to a family with no health insurance. In this, the wealthiest nation in the world, our infant mortality rate is second highest in the industrialized world. Forty-seven million Americans are uninsured (50 percent employed; 25 percent children; 20 percent out of labor force as students, disabled, et al.; 5 percent unemployed). The U.S. spends nearly twice as much per capita than any other country on health care, but we rank poorly in the thirty-seven categories of health status measured by the World Health Organization. The rise in childhood obesity, asthma, diabetes, and other chronic diseases indicates that the overall health status of people of this country is declining.*

*We are warned by the prophets not to heal the wounds of God’s people lightly; yet in 2006 the aggregate profits of the health insurance companies in the United States were \$68 billion. During that same year more than 15,000 families were forced into bankruptcy because of medical expenses. Our business employers operate at a competitive disadvantage internationally because health care costs are assumed by the governments of other industrialized nations. The General Assemblies of the PC(USA) and its predecessors since 1971 have called for reform of health delivery systems in the United States to make them accessible to the entire population. Our federal government already operates efficiently and with low overhead the health delivery programs of Medicare and Medicaid; and yet at the same time insurance companies spend nearly one-third of every premium dollar on marketing and other administrative costs and in*

*fact, several such companies spend less than 60 percent of premium dollars they receive on health care services.*

*The American College of Physicians, the nation's second largest physician group, has endorsed a single-payer healthcare system. Only a single-payer system of national health care coverage (privately provided; publicly financed; not socialized medicine) can save what is estimated to be \$350 billion wasted annually on medical bureaucracy and redirect those funds to expanded coverage.*

Since the publication of this resolution, the nation has been engaged in an escalating polarization on the issue. Consensus seems far off and the details of how to reach the goal of comprehensive health care continue to confound our country. Yet, consensus as a nation is imperative because reforming our health care system cannot wait. The General Assembly has been clear that Congress must enact comprehensive health care reform that will provide all persons with access to health care services.

I am mindful of a portion of a prayer Peter Marshall prayed in 1947 when he was chaplain of the Senate. "We know deep down in our hearts that without Thy guidance we can do nothing, but with Thee we can do all things. Let us not be frightened by the problems that confront us, but rather give Thee thanks that Thou hast matched us with this hour. May we resolve, God helping us, to be part of the answer, and not part of the problem; for Jesus' sake. Amen."