May 13, 2004

The Honorable Bill Frist
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Frist:

The continued escalating cost of health care is becoming a significant barrier to affordable health benefits, making coverage increasingly difficult for employers to voluntarily provide and working families to afford. In light of this, **we strongly urge you to oppose any legislation that would impose new health care mandates – particularly the Domenici-Kennedy mental health benefits bill – which will increase health costs even more and reduce access to affordable coverage**.

Employer health care costs are expected to increase an average of 14 percent this year, the fourth consecutive year of double-digit increases (Hewitt Associates and Kaiser Family Foundation). The Domenici-Kennedy mental health benefits bill will only add to these already skyrocketing costs. The Congressional Budget Office found that legislation similar to the Domenici-Kennedy mandate would raise health costs an additional $23 billion over the next five years, making it 11 times more costly than simply extending the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996.

At a time when access to affordable health coverage is most difficult, costly new government-imposed mandates must be avoided. Such mandates will ultimately lead to fewer – not more – available benefits for working families. We therefore strongly urge you to oppose the Domenici-Kennedy mental health benefits bill, and any other legislation that would add to the already soaring cost of health care.

<div align="center">Sincerely,</div>

U.S. Chamber of Commerce	National Federation of Independent Business
American Benefits Council	National Association of Manufacturers
National Restaurant Association	National Retail Federation
National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors	Retail Industry Leaders Association
National Council of Chain Restaurants	Associated Builders and Contractors
Printing Industries of America	The ERISA Industry Committee
National Business Group on Health	Food Marketing Institute

c.c.   Members of the U.S. Senate