

GAO Report Inconclusive About Whether Alternatives to Individual Mandate Are Economically Viable

WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 25, 2011 – A Government Accountability Office report made public today analyzes alternatives to the requirement in the Affordable Care Act that most people purchase health insurance. Although the report, which was prepared at the request of Sen. Ben Nelson (D-NE), identified possible alternatives to the individual mandate, it did not show that those alternatives would cover as many people as the so-called “individual mandate” or “individual responsibility” provision would.

Following is a statement from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN):

“ ACS CAN believes that the critical patient protections in the Affordable Care Act, including those that end discrimination in the insurance market against people with cancer, would not be economically viable without the law’s individual responsibility provision. That is why ACS CAN joined the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association in an amicus brief defending the provision in federal court.

“ The individual responsibility provision has proven to be one of the more unpopular provisions in an imperfect bill, but by insuring that nearly all Americans have coverage, the provision will enable consumer out-of-pocket costs to stay within reasonable limits and ensure that the law’s critical patient protections can remain in effect.

“ Although the GAO report discusses alternatives to the individual responsibility provision, it provides little analysis showing that any of them would lead to equivalent, economically sustainable insurance coverage for the 32 million additional Americans who will be covered under the Affordable Care Act.

“ Senator Nelson deserves credit for being one of the few policy-makers willing to engage in a constructive effort to find a consensus on the coverage provisions of the Act. Because of the weakness of the GAO findings, ACS CAN recommends that the GAO undertake additional analysis to assess whether any of these alternatives would result in quality, affordable coverage for as many Americans as would the individual responsibility provision.”

ACS CAN, the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society, supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN works to encourage elected officials and candidates to make cancer a top national priority. ACS CAN gives ordinary people extraordinary power to fight cancer with the training and tools they need to make their voices heard. For more information, visit www.acscan.org.

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