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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY RESPONDS TO NEW HOUSE HEALTH CARE BILL: Disability Advocates Question Who Will be the Gatekeeper

AGOURA HILLS, Calif., Nov. 2, 2009 – House Democrats announced today that the new health care bill does include a public option. The co-sponsors of this bill claim that it guarantees that up to 96 percent of Americans will have coverage. They also claim that the bill will make it easier for individuals to purchase insurance and it will prevent insurance companies from denying coverage to those with pre-existing conditions. However, if the government is going to play a larger role in health care delivery, who will be the gatekeeper? Will this larger governmental role lower costs and improve quality?

“Those with disabilities, the chronically-ill, and the elderly are the very ones who need quality health care the most,” says Joni Eareckson Tada, the Founder and CEO of Joni and Friends (JAF) disability ministry. “And because that care can also be the most expensive, we are concerned that these most vulnerable will represent the ones whose lives are determined not worthy of the cost.”

National health care reform continues to be one of the most important issues facing Americans, and the current initiative raises many questions about gate-keeping that concern JAF and its public policy initiative, the Christian Institute on Disability (CID). “We at the CID understand the desire to provide health care for every American,” CID Public Policy Director Dr. Kathy McReynolds said. “However, we are very concerned that health care reform could force insurance companies or the government to begin to discriminate against the most vulnerable because they may not meet certain outcomes required by evidence-based medicine. The gatekeeper should be the health care provider who has the best interest of the patient as a primary concern. This reflects the long tradition of Hippocratic medicine.”

“JAF believes this scenario would clearly undermine the sanctity of life principle, which until modern times provided the foundation of Western medicine. The Western ethic was informed by an absolute respect for the sanctity of life and this principle has historically supported the ethics of medicine. The American public has yet to grasp the enormous consequences of a move away from this sanctity of life principle,” JAF President Doug Mazza said.

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Tada understands that those who care about these issues and who want to uphold a culture of life must engage in the marketplace of ideas. This led her to establish the CID, one of the newest initiatives of her worldwide disability ministry. A vital component of the Institute is its Public Policy Center, with a primary objective to address the most pressing issues in medicine today.

Despite her paralysis, which has left her a quadriplegic in a wheelchair for more than 40 years, Joni Eareckson Tada works tirelessly every day to fulfill her vision to help society's most vulnerable. Tada is passionately concerned about the many issues currently being debated in the medical arena, such as health care reform, reproductive technologies, and end of life care.

Mazza explained that this is why the CID was established – to educate the church on these important ethical concerns in medicine. “The Public Policy Center is a vital resource to prepare Christians who will inevitably face these life and death questions,” he added.

Long before they were considered “hot topics,” Tada and the staff at the CID anticipated the ethical issues surrounding embryonic stem cell research and the removal of nutrition and hydration. They believe that Terry Schiavo's death on March 31, 2005, was a wake-up call to the Christian community that the lives of the most vulnerable are under threat. The CID continues to lead the charge by providing a biblical response to these issues that are now a part of the national conversation.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, Joni and Friends, through the International Disability Center, offers a wide array of life-affirming ministries to people with disabilities around the world, including international radio and television programs filled with inspirational stories. Wheels for the World sees thousands of individuals receive wheelchairs and the life-giving message of the Gospel. Every year families affected by disability learn that they are not alone when they attend Family Retreats across the U.S. and now around the world.

– 30 –

Note to Editors: For more information about the Joni and Friends Christian Institute on Disability or to arrange an interview with or Joni Eareckson Tada or CID representatives, please contact Melany Ethridge of A. Larry Ross Communications at 972.267.1111 or melany@alarryross.com.