

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **Rep. Charlie Crist, Rep. Kathy Castor Call to Improve Health Care and Lower Costs for Floridians**

*Rep. Charlie Crist, Rep. Kathy Castor, and Health Care Advocates Join Protect Our Care on the Nationwide “Lower Costs, Better Care” Bus Tour to Demonstrate the Urgent Need to Lower the Cost of Prescription Drugs and Cover Floridians Who Fall Into the Medicaid Gap*



**[Tampa, FL]** - This afternoon, Protect Our Care’s “Care Force One” arrived in Tampa to demonstrate the need for lowering Floridians’ health costs, expanding coverage, and reducing racial disparities in care. Headlined by Congressman Charlie Crist (D-FL-13th) and Congresswoman Kathy Castor (D-FL-14th), the event highlighted how Democrats are leading the charge to advance American health care and held Republicans accountable for continuing to reject measures to improve care and lower costs for Floridians.

**[You Can Watch the Event Here.](#)**

Throughout the nationwide [“Lower Cost, Better Care”](#) bus tour, Protect Our Care is fighting to ensure critical health care measures supported by President Biden remain in upcoming budget reconciliation legislation. These priorities include giving Medicare the power to negotiate for lower drug prices for all Americans, getting more Americans covered by closing the Medicaid gap, expanding Medicare benefits to include hearing, dental, and vision, and further reducing health care premiums for millions of Americans who purchase coverage on their own.

“Earlier this week, I was proud to stand with the people of Florida to advance President Biden's historic and, yes, groundbreaking Build Back Better plan.

“The cost of prescription drugs frankly is out of control in our country; this budget framework we have passed gives us the tools to do something about it,” said **Congressman Charlie Crist (D-FL-13th)**. “One family in my district--the McKenney family--told me about how they had to pay \$120 for 3 days worth of their daughters' life-sustaining insulin. That is unconscionable, and it is a state of affairs that needs to end. For too long, Americans have been squeezed by high drug prices, while drug companies make record profits. By allowing Medicare to negotiate the cost of drug prices, we can level the playing field, and we must do it.

“The whole pandemic has illuminated the weaknesses in our healthcare system—issues we intend to now address and build back better,” said **Congresswoman Kathy Castor (D-FL-10th)**. “I want all of our Tampa Bay area neighbors to know that they can count on me and Congressman Crist to fight for better care and lowering costs. Here is what we are going to do in the Build Back Better agenda, which we will be hammering out in the coming weeks. We intend to fight to lower health care costs for all families. We are going to fight to lower drug costs for all families. And we are going to close the Medicaid gap, which keeps almost 1 million Floridians without consistent coverage and care.”

“There are over 800,000 people in Florida who are trapped between Obamacare and nowhere,” stated **State Representative Dianne Hart (HD-61)**. “That is an extremely big issue, and one that Congress is equipped to tackle with this budget framework. In the middle of this pandemic, which continues to disproportionately affect communities of color, we need to provide every opportunity for folks to have the access they need to good health care. Even if our Governor and the Florida Legislature still refuse to take this issue head-on, as Florida remains one of 12 states that have held out on expanding Medicaid, I am hopeful that Congress can. Thank you to Congressman Crist, and Congresswoman Castor, for all of the incredible work you are doing to ensure that we have the health care access and affordability we need here in Tampa Bay, in Florida, and in our country.”

“As a pharmacist here in Tampa, I am a huge proponent of the budget plan's expansion of the Medicare program,” said **Dr. Vondalyn Wright, owner of Health Matters Pharmacy**. “Filling in the major coverage gaps by including dental, vision, and hearing benefits, and lowering the eligibility age, means more people in our community can get the type of care they need. I have also seen firsthand how some people struggle to make ends meet on prescriptions, because the prices are simply too high for them to afford often life-saving medication. It is a heartbreaking situation that plays out everyday in my pharmacy and in pharmacies everywhere. I am so happy to see that our representatives, like Congressman Crist and Congresswoman Castor, are leading the charge in Congress to make health care coverage and treatment more affordable, more accessible, and more equitable.”

“Expanding Medicaid is perhaps the single greatest thing we can do to guarantee better

healthcare for individuals with disabilities, and for folks generally who fall into the Medicaid gap,” **said Karen Clay, chair of the Democratic Disability Caucus of Florida.** “The health care system in our country is ranked as one of the best in the free world, but accessing that care is another matter altogether. My son Mike, who passed away last year, was born with a severe form of spinal muscular atrophy. That condition put both of us on a journey through the state and country’s healthcare system for the past almost 40 years. We had health insurance provided through employment that resulted in lifetime caps, denials, exclusion due to pre-existing conditions, and even job loss because of my son’s underlying medical condition. It is an absolute disgrace that Governor DeSantis and Republicans in the Legislature have refused to take action to provide more access to healthcare to so many who need it. Luckily, we have fighters like Congresswoman Castor and Congressman Crist who are fighting to do what Republicans refuse to do. If we can pass Medicaid expansion federally for Florida, it would be a literal lifesaver for so many families in our state.”

“When I was fighting stage 4 cancer, I had to forego medication that would boost my immune system because the price tag was simply too high,” **said Laura Packard, national healthcare advocate.** “I wound up in the hospital, and nearly died. Sadly, stories like these are all too common in our country. Patients should be able to focus on getting well, not struggling to pay for medications. That’s why we need Congress to act now to lower the cost of prescription drugs, including allowing Medicare to negotiate prices on behalf of all Americans.”

Next week, “Care Force One” will head to Denver, Colorado. For more information, please visit [protectourcare.org/bus-tour/](https://protectourcare.org/bus-tour/).

### **The Protect Our Care “Lower Costs, Better Care” Bus Tour is making stops in:**

**Bangor, Maine** on Monday, August 9, 2021  
**Portland, Maine** on Monday, August 9, 2021  
**Burlington, Vermont** on Tuesday, August 10, 2021  
**Concord, New Hampshire** on Wednesday, August 11, 2021  
**Teaneck, New Jersey** on Thursday, August 12, 2021  
**Bethlehem, Pennsylvania** on Thursday, August 12, 2021  
**New York, New York** on Friday, August 13, 2021  
**New Brunswick, New Jersey** on Monday, August 16, 2021  
**Scranton, Pennsylvania** on Monday, August 16, 2021  
**Burlington County, New Jersey** on Tuesday, August 17, 2021  
**Wilmington, Delaware** on Tuesday, August 17, 2021  
**Dover, Delaware** on Tuesday, August 17, 2021  
**Morgantown, West Virginia** on Wednesday, August 18, 2021  
**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania** on Wednesday, August 18, 2021  
**Youngstown, Ohio** on Thursday, August 19, 2021  
**Columbus, Ohio** on Thursday, August 19, 2021  
**Milwaukee, Wisconsin** on Friday, August 20, 2021

**Madison, Wisconsin** on Friday, August 20, 2021  
**Parkersburg, West Virginia** on Monday, August 23, 2021  
**Charleston, West Virginia** on Monday, August 23, 2021  
**Raleigh, North Carolina** on Tuesday, August 24, 2021  
**Charlotte, North Carolina** on Tuesday, August 24, 2021  
**Columbia, South Carolina** on Tuesday, August 24, 2021  
**Atlanta, Georgia** on Wednesday, August 25, 2021  
**Savannah, Georgia** on Wednesday, August 25, 2021  
**Orlando, Florida** on Thursday, August 26, 2021  
**Tampa, Florida** on Thursday, August 26, 2021  
**Denver, Colorado** on Monday, August 30, 2021  
**Flagstaff, Arizona** on Tuesday, August 31, 2021  
**Phoenix, Arizona** on Tuesday, August 31, 2021  
**Tucson, Arizona** on Wednesday, September 1, 2021  
**San Diego, California** on Thursday, September 2, 2021  
**Anaheim, California** on Thursday, September 2, 2021  
**Las Vegas, Nevada** on Friday, September 3, 2021

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