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Remarks on House of Representatives Passage of Health Care Reform Legislation

November 8, 2009

Good afternoon, everybody. I just want to say a few words about two milestones that have passed in the last few hours that represent encouraging progress for our country.

The first was the historic vote the House took last night on health insurance reform. For years we've been told that this couldn't be done. After all, neither Chamber of Congress has been able to pass a comprehensive health insurance reform bill for generations, but last night the House proved differently.

The Affordable Health Care for America Act is a piece of legislation that will provide stability and security for Americans who have insurance, quality, affordable options for those who don't, and bring down the cost of health care for families, businesses, and our Government, while strengthening the financial health of Medicare. It is legislation that is fully paid for, and it will reduce our long-term Federal deficit.

Given the heated and often misleading rhetoric surrounding this legislation, I know that this was a courageous vote for many Members of Congress, and I'm grateful to them and for the rest of their colleagues for taking us this far. But more importantly, so are the millions of Americans whose lives will change when we achieve insurance reform: families with preexisting conditions who will finally have insurance coverage; parents who will be protected from annual and lifetime limits that can force them to pay exorbitant out-of-pocket costs for a child's illness; small businesses that will finally be able to cover their employees; and working folks who will finally be able to afford health insurance for the very first time.

Americans like Katie Gibson, a cancer survivor from Bozeman, Montana, who shared her story with me this summer. Because of a medical condition, Katie's insurance policy was suddenly revoked when she needed it most, even though she was paying her premiums. I called Katie this morning, and I told her that when the bill that passed last night becomes law, we'll be able to protect Americans just like her from the kinds of insurance company abuses she had to endure. And I told her that it was because of her willingness to share her story and the extraordinary activism that she and people like her all across the country displayed—not just this year, but over the last several years—that we are finally this close to getting reform done.

Their lives are what's at stake in this debate, and moments like this are why they sent us here, to finally meet the challenges that Washington has put off for decades, to make their lives better and this Nation stronger, to move America forward. That's what the House did last night when it brought us closer than we have ever been to comprehensive health insurance reform in America.

Now it falls on the United States Senate to take the baton and bring this effort to the finish line on behalf of the American people. And I'm absolutely confident that they will. And I'm equally convinced that on the day that we gather here at the White House and I sign comprehensive health insurance reform legislation into law, they'll be able to join their House colleagues and say that this was their finest moment in public service, the moment we

delivered change we promised to the American people and did something to leave this country stronger than we found it.

Passage of Election Legislation by the Iraqi Parliament

The second development I want to mention is a significant breakthrough in Iraq, where Iraq's parliament has approved a new election law that paves the way for national elections early next year. This is an important milestone as the Iraqi people continue to take responsibility for their future.

I want to congratulate Iraq's leaders for reaching this agreement. Their flexibility and commitment to their country sends an important signal to the world about Iraq's democracy and national unity. And I look forward to prompt approval of this law by Iraq's Presidency Council.

Iraq has known many challenges, and in the past several weeks, we've seen that there are still those who would kill innocent men, women, and children to deny the Iraqi people the future they deserve. Today's step forward is another reminder that these enemies of the Iraqi people will fail.

The United States will continue to stand with Iraq as a strong partner and as a friend. Tough challenges remain, and I'm sure that there will be difficult days to come. But this agreement advances the political progress that can bring lasting peace and unity to Iraq and allow for the orderly and responsible transition of American combat troops out of Iraq by next September.

So I want to congratulate our troops and civilians who are serving so capably in Iraq, and I want to congratulate the Iraqi people who have taken an important step forward in pursuit of a better future.

There's much more work to be done, but with today's news, we're continuing to move in the right direction as we continue to look forward to Iraqi elections early next year.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

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