

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks on Senate Passage of Health Care Reform Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

December 24, 2009

The President. Good morning, everybody. In a historic vote that took place this morning, Members of the Senate joined their colleagues in the House of Representatives to pass a landmark health insurance reform package, legislation that brings us toward the end of a nearly century-long struggle to reform America's health care system.

Ever since Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform in 1912, seven Presidents—Democrats and Republicans alike—have taken up the cause of reform. Time and time again, such efforts have been blocked by special interest lobbyists who've perpetuated a status quo that works better for the insurance industry than it does for the American people. But with passage of reform bills in both the House and the Senate, we are now finally poised to deliver on the promise of real, meaningful health insurance reform that will bring additional security and stability to the American people.

The reform bill that passed the Senate this morning, like the House bill, includes the toughest measures ever taken to hold the insurance industry accountable. Insurance companies will no longer be able to deny you coverage on the basis of a preexisting condition. They will no longer be able to drop your coverage when you get sick. No longer will you have to pay unlimited amounts out of your own pocket for the treatments you need. And you'll be able to appeal unfair decisions by insurance companies to an independent party.

If this legislation becomes law, workers won't have to worry about losing coverage if they lose or change jobs, families will save on their premiums, businesses that would see their costs rise if we do not act will save money now, and they will save money in the future. This bill will strengthen Medicare and extend the life of the program. It will make coverage affordable for over 30 million Americans who do not have it—30 million Americans. And because it is paid for and curbs the waste and inefficiency in our health care system, this bill will help reduce our deficit by as much as \$1.3 trillion in the coming decades, making it the largest deficit reduction plan in over a decade.

As I've said before, these are not small reforms, these are big reforms. If passed, this will be the most important piece of social legislation since the Social Security Act in the 1930s and the most important reform of our health care system since Medicare passed in the 1960s. And what makes it so important is not just its cost savings or its deficit reductions. It's the impact reform will have on Americans who no longer have to go without a checkup or prescriptions that they need because they can't afford them, on families who no longer have to worry that a single illness will send them into financial ruin, and on businesses that will no longer face exorbitant insurance rates that hamper their competitiveness. It's the difference reform will make in the lives of the American people.

I want to commend Senator Harry Reid, extraordinary work that he did; Speaker Pelosi for her extraordinary leadership and dedication. Having passed reform bills in both the House and the Senate, we now have to take up the last and most important step and reach an agreement on a final reform bill that I can sign into law. And I look forward to working with Members of Congress in both chambers over the coming weeks to do exactly that.

With today's vote, we are now incredibly close to making health insurance reform a reality in this country. Our challenge then is to finish the job. We can't doom another generation of Americans to soaring costs and eroding coverage and exploding deficits. Instead, we need to do what we were sent here to do and improve the lives of the people we serve. For the sake of our citizens, our economy, and our future, let's make 2010 the year we finally reform health care in the United States of America.

Everybody, merry Christmas, happy New Year.

President's Message to U.S. Military Personnel

Q. Do you have a holiday wish for the troops?

The President. I do, and I will be actually—I'm on my way right now to call a few of them and wish them merry Christmas and to thank them for their extraordinary service as they're posted in Iraq and Afghanistan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:47 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to H.R. 3590. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Health care reform legislation, Senate passage; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House .

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Pelosi, Nancy; Reid, Harry.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Service and dedication; Budget, Federal : Deficit; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Legislation, proposed : "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2009".

DCPD Number: DCPD200901014.