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Remarks at a Roundtable Discussion With Beneficiaries of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and an Exchange With Reporters

February 3, 2015

The President. Well, we are here with a bunch of folks who took the time to come to Washington, DC, and tell me face to face stories that they have told me in letters that they've written over the course of the last year. Everybody here has directly benefited from the Affordable Care Act, and it's a pretty good representative sample of people whose lives have been impacted in powerful ways.

You have folks like Tonya and Regina and Don, who had cancer, in some cases, before the Affordable Care Act was passed and were having trouble getting insurance. And because we no longer allow insurance companies to bar people because they've got preexisting conditions, they were now able to get health insurance and have the security and relief that was needed.

Regina said, for the first time since she was 12 years old, when she was first diagnosed with cancer, she felt free and now is planning her wedding with her fiancé. Tonya, who shortly after signing up for the ACA, in a checkup was diagnosed with a brain tumor, would not have even discovered it had it not been for the Affordable Care Act, and certainly would not have been able to afford treatments. The same is true for Don, who, as a consequence of regular checkups, in a colonoscopy that was part of the prevention regimen in the Affordable Care Act, was able to catch a tumor early and is now cancer-free.

We also have people who were able to benefit from Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. So Ann in Connecticut, Derrick in California, both were able to get on a plan that they could afford, even as they were working, even as they were taking care of families, and as a consequence, are healthier for it. Ann was able to catch breast cancer early.

We have small-businesspeople, like Lynette over here and Darlene, who, because they weren't working for a company, had a tough time affording the premiums. And Lynette saved herself about $300-and-something a month in premiums, and Lynette is—was able to cut her premiums in half. And she's got a cupcake company, I think—[*laughter*]—and she says she brought some samples, but Secret Service may have gotten them. [*Laughter*]

Maria, a teacher in Fairfax, Virginia; Naomi, a farmer down in Roberta, Georgia—both of them were able to benefit from greatly reduced premiums and, as a consequence, are able to maintain their health and pay their bills at the same time.

And then, Susanne has got a wonderful story. She's a doctor in rural Virginia—rural West Virginia. And not only are her and her sister able to benefit from the Affordable Care Act, but more importantly for her, patients that she had been seeing for years who would forego critical treatments are now able to pay for the tests and the medication that they need to maintain their health.

And so the bottom line is that the Affordable Care Act is not an abstraction. The debate about making sure that every person in America is able to get basic, high-quality, affordable health care is not some political, ideological battle. It's about people. And for someone like Regina, who was diagnosed at the age of 12 with cancer, to have a sense of security so that she was able to finish college and is able now to plan her life, that is something that we should expect a country as wealthy as ours is providing to every person, to every citizen. And the idea

that we would even consider taking that away from Regina or Tonya or Susanne's patients makes absolutely no sense.

Now, the good news is that we have over 10 million people who've now signed up under the Federal exchanges and millions more who are signing up from the expanded Medicaid that's taking place in States all across the country. And those are millions of people who are saving money, millions of people who are getting preventive care, millions of people who feel for the first time, in some cases, the security of knowing that if something goes wrong in their families or with them that they're covered, that somebody has got their backs, that they're not going to be bankrupt, that they're not going to have to split the pills that have been prescribed in half because that's all they can afford. They can continue with their professions or their schooling. And it makes this country more productive. It's good for all of us.

So my understanding is, the House of Representatives has scheduled yet another vote today to take health care away from the folks sitting around this table. I don't know whether it's the 55th or the 60th time that they are taking this vote. But I've asked this question before: Why is it that this would be at the top of their agenda, making sure that folks who don't have health care aren't able to get it?

It was maybe plausible to be opposed to the Affordable Care Act before it was implemented, but now it is being implemented and it is working. And people are being covered, just as anticipated. The premiums on average are less than a hundred dollars when you take into account the tax credit, so it is affordable for the people that it was designed to help. Health care inflation is at its lowest rate in 50 years. The overall tab for the Affordable Care Act is costing less than the original projections.

In every respect, this is working not just as intended, but better than intended. And so the notion that we would play politics with the lives of folks who are out there working hard every single day, trying to make ends meet, trying to look after their families, makes absolutely no sense. And that's a message that I wanted to send very directly today.

I've got a second interest here, and that is that we still have the opportunity for millions of more people to sign up. The deadline for signing up for 2015 is February 15. So we've got a little over a week for people to sign up. For the cost of less than your cell phone bill or your cable bill, you can have the same kind of health security that the folks around this table do.

And I want to remind everybody—Ann told the story that she really didn't think she needed health insurance, ended up getting it because she heard that there was a fee involved if she didn't get it, ended up purchasing it—or ended up getting—finding out she was qualified for Medicaid because of the expanded Medicaid in Connecticut, and it was only after she signed up that she discovered through a mammogram that she had breast cancer.

So it turns out that even if you think out there that you're not going to need health insurance, you very may well need it at some point in your life. And here's an opportunity to sign up.

So I want everybody to get on healthcare.gov, find out what options are available to you in your State and in your community. We have people around this table who are paying as little as $30 or $20 a month for premiums. Some are paying more, but again, the average is less than a hundred dollars a month. And that is something that a lot of folks out there can afford. And we've got millions of people who are still qualified who have a chance to sign up, but you've got to do it by February 15.

So get on healthcare.gov, look at what your options are. Don't take my word for it. But understand that this is something that can give you the kind of security and peace of mind that is priceless.

And to my friends up on Capitol Hill, I would just ask them once again to consider why they would think it an important priority to take away health care for some 10 million people, people who are working hard and, in many cases, through no fault of their own, got dealt a bad hand.

Regina, at the age of 12, wasn't asking to have a series of cancers. And anybody who has a chance to talk to her would know we want her to succeed. She's overcome incredible odds. Why would we want to take health care away from her? Why would we want to make it impossible for her to live out her life with some sense of security and peace of mind? It doesn't make any sense.

So I just want to thank everybody here for sharing their stories. I'm very proud of them, and I'm proud of the work that they're doing to help spread the word. But I hope all of you—since you've got a lot of cameras and microphones—spread the word as well. You've got to sign up by February 15.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Death of Jordanian Air Force Pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Terrorist Organization

Q. Mr. President, any reaction to the Jordanian pilot who, ISIS said, was burned alive?

The President. I just got word of the video that had been released. I don't know the details of the confirmations. But should, in fact, this video be authentic, it's just one more indication of the viciousness and barbarity of this organization. And it, I think, will redouble the vigilance and determination on the part of a global coalition to make sure that they are degraded and ultimately defeated.

And it also just indicates the degree to which, whatever ideology they're operating off of, it's bankrupt. We're here to talk about how to make people healthier and make their lives better, and this organization appears only interested in death and destruction.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. Participating in the roundtable discussion were Dallas, TX, resident Tonya Fisher, Philadelphia, PA, resident Regina Moran, Phoenix, AZ, resident Don Kuk, Westport, CT, resident Ann Chrisman, San Francisco, CA, resident Derrick Benn, Hyattsville, MD, resident Lynette Jackson, Cary, NC, resident Darlene Whitted, Fairfax, VA, resident Maria Villavicencio, Roberta, GA, resident Naomi Rosan, and Morgantown, WV, resident Susanne Choby.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act beneficiaries, roundtable discussion; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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