

The President's Weekly Address *October 10, 2009*

The historic movement to bring real, meaningful health insurance reform to the American people gathered momentum this week as we approach the final days of this debate. Having worked on this issue for the better part of a year, the Senate Finance Committee is finishing deliberations on their version of a health insurance reform bill that will soon be merged with other reform bills produced by other congressional committees.

After evaluating the Finance Committee's bill, the Congressional Budget Office, an office that provides independent, nonpartisan analysis, concluded that the legislation would make coverage affordable for millions of Americans who don't have it today. It will bring greater security to Americans who have coverage with new insurance protections. And, by attacking waste and fraud within the system, it will slow the growth in health care costs without adding a dime to our deficits. This is another milestone on what's been a long, hard road toward health insurance reform.

In recent months, we've heard every side of every argument from both sides of the aisle, and rightly so. Health insurance reform is a complex and critical issue that deserves a vigorous national debate, and we've had one. The approach that is emerging includes the best ideas from Republicans and Democrats and people across the political spectrum.

In fact, what's remarkable is not that we've had a spirited debate about health insurance reform, but the unprecedented consensus that has come together behind it. This consensus encompasses everyone from doctors and nurses to hospitals and drug manufacturers.

And earlier this week, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg came out in support of reform, joining two former Republican Senate majority leaders: Bob Dole and Dr. Bill Frist, himself a cardiac surgeon. Dr. Louis Sullivan, Secretary of Health and Human Services under President George H.W. Bush, sup-

ports reform, as does Republican Tommy Thompson, a former Wisconsin Governor and Secretary of Health and Human Services under President George W. Bush. These distinguished leaders understand that health insurance reform isn't a Democratic issue or a Republican issue, but an American issue that demands a solution.

Still, there are some in Washington today who seem determined to play the same old partisan politics, working to score political points, even if it means burdening this country with an unsustainable status quo: a status quo of rising health care costs that are crushing our families, our businesses, and our government; a status quo of diminishing coverage that's denying millions of hard-working Americans the insurance they need; a status quo that gives big insurance companies the power to make arbitrary decisions about your health care. That's a status quo I reject and that's a status quo the American people reject.

The distinguished former congressional leaders who urged us to act on health insurance reform spoke of the historic moment at hand and reminded us that this moment will not soon come again. They called on members of both parties to seize this opportunity to finally confront a problem that has plagued us for far too long.

That is what we are called to do at this moment. That is the spirit of national purpose that we must summon right now. Now is the time to rise above the politics of the moment. Now is the time to come together as Americans. Now is the time to meet our responsibilities to ourselves and to our children and secure a better, healthier future for generations to come. That future is within our grasp. So let's go finish the job.

Thanks.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 12 p.m. on October 9 in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House for

broadcast on October 10. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 9, but was embargoed for

release until 6 a.m. on October 10. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at the Human Rights Campaign Annual Dinner October 10, 2009

The President. Thank you, everybody. Please, you're making me blush. [*Laughter*]

Audience member. We love you, Barack!

The President. I love you back!

To Joe Solmonese, who's doing an outstanding job on behalf of HRC; to my great friend and supporter Terry Bean, cofounder of HRC; Representative Patrick Kennedy; David Huebner, the Ambassador-designee to New Zealand and Samoa; John Berry, our Director of OPM, who's doing a great job; Nancy Sutley, chairman of Council on Environmental Quality; Fred Hochberg, chairman of Export-Import Bank; and my dear friend Tipper Gore, who's in the house.

Thank you so much, all of you. It is a privilege to be here tonight to open for Lady Gaga—[*laughter*—I've made it. [*Laughter*] I want to thank the Human Rights Campaign for inviting me to speak and for the work you do every day in pursuit of equality on behalf of the millions of people in this country who work hard in their jobs and care deeply about their families and who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

For nearly 30 years, you've advocated on behalf of those without a voice. That's not easy. For despite the real gains that we've made, there's still laws to change, and there's still hearts to open. There are still fellow citizens, perhaps neighbors, even loved ones, good and decent people, who hold fast to outworn arguments and old attitudes, who fail to see your families like their families, who would deny you the rights most Americans take for granted. And that's painful, and it's heart-breaking. And yet you continue, leading by the force of the arguments you make and by the power of the example that you set in your own lives as parents and friends, as PTA members and church members, as advocates and leaders in your communities. And you're making a difference.

That's the story of the movement for fairness and equality and not just for those who are gay, but for all those in our history who've been denied the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, for all who've been told that the full blessings and opportunities of this country were closed to them. It's the story of progress sought by those with little influence or power, by men and women who brought about change through quiet, personal acts of compassion and defiance wherever and whenever they could.

It's the story of the Stonewall protests, when a group of citizens with a few options—[*applause*—when a group of citizens with few options and fewer supporters stood up against discrimination and helped to inspire a movement. It's the story of an epidemic that decimated a community and the gay men and women who came to support one another and save one another, who continue to fight this scourge, who have demonstrated before the world that different kinds of families can show the same compassion in a time of need. And it's the story of the Human Rights Campaign and the fights you've fought for nearly 30 years, helping to elect candidates who share your values, standing against those who would enshrine discrimination into our Constitution, advocating on behalf of those living with HIV/AIDS, and fighting for progress in our Capital and across America.

This story, this fight, continues now, and I'm here with a simple message: I'm here with you in that fight. For even as we face extraordinary challenges as a nation, we cannot and we will not put aside issues of basic equality. I greatly appreciate the support I've received from many in this room. I also appreciate that many of you don't believe progress has come fast enough. I want to be honest about that, because it's important to be honest among friends.