

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009*

## **Remarks Following a Meeting With Senate Democrats on Health Care Reform**

*December 15, 2009*

Hello, everybody. We just had a very productive session about the final stages of health care reform in the Senate. And from the discussions we had it's clear that we are on the precipice of an achievement that's eluded Congresses and Presidents for generations, an achievement that will touch the lives of nearly every American.

There are still some differences that have to be worked on. This was not a roll call; this was a broad-based discussion about how we move forward. But whatever differences remain, there is broad consensus around reforms that will finally—number one—protect every American from the worst practices in the health insurance industry. No longer will these companies be able to deny you coverage if you have a preexisting illness or condition. No longer will they be able to drop you from coverage when you get sick. No longer will you have to pay unlimited amounts out of your own pocket for the treatments that you need. We are all in agreement on those reforms.

We agree on reforms that will finally reduce the costs of health care. Families will save on their premiums; businesses that will see their costs rise if we do nothing will save money now and in the future. This plan will strengthen Medicare and extend the life of that program. And because it gets rid of the waste and inefficiencies in our health care system, this will be the largest deficit reduction plan in over a decade.

I just want to repeat this because there's so much misinformation about the cost issue here. You talk to every health care economist out there, and they will tell you that whatever ideas are—whatever ideas exist in terms of bending the cost curve and starting to reduce costs for families, businesses, and government, those elements are in this bill.

And in terms of deficits, because we keep on hearing these ads about how this is going to add to the deficit, the CBO has said that this is a deficit reduction, not a deficit increase. So all the scare tactics out there, all the ads that are out there, are simply inaccurate.

Some of the same people who cited the CBO when it was saying it didn't reduce the deficit, saying CBO is the most credible possible arbiter of whether or not this adds to our deficit, now suddenly are ignoring what the CBO says.

Finally, we agree on reforms that will make coverage affordable for 30 million Americans who don't have it. Every day that goes by, another 14,000 Americans lose their health care coverage. A recent study shows that in the next decade, half of all Americans under the age of 65 will be without coverage at some point. On the other hand, if this reform passes—when it passes—for the very first time in their lives, these Americans will be able to provide health insurance for their families. And those Americans who are already covered will no longer have to live in fear that their family might fall through the cracks of the system we have now.

These aren't small changes; these are big changes. They represent the most significant reform of our health care system since the passage of Medicare. They will save money; they will save families money, they will save businesses money, and they will save government money. And they're going to save lives. And that's why this reform is supported by groups like

the AARP who represents most of America's seniors. That's why this reform has to pass on our watch.

Now, let's be clear: The final bill won't include everything that everybody wants. No bill can do that. But what I told my former colleagues today is that we simply cannot allow differences over individual elements of this plan to prevent us from meeting our responsibility to solve a longstanding and urgent problem for the American people. They are waiting for us to act. They are counting on us to show leadership. And I don't intend to let them down, and neither do the people standing next to me. There's too much at stake for families who can't pay their medical bills, or see a doctor when they need to, or get the treatment they need. The stakes are enormous for them.

The stakes are enormous for businesses, who are already seeing their premiums go up 15, 20, 30 percent. A lot of the critics of this entire process fail to note what happens if nothing gets done, and the American people have to be very clear about this: If we don't get this done, your premiums are guaranteed to go up. If this does not get done, more employers are going to drop coverage cause they can't afford it. If this does not get done, it is guaranteed that Medicare and Medicaid will blow a hole through our budget.

Those things are guaranteed. That's the status quo. That is the trajectory that we are currently on. I don't intend to have that happen. And I believe that the Senate doesn't intend to have that happen. And I think any fair reading of this bill will indicate that all the criteria that I laid out when I met before a joint session have now been met. It is deficit neutral, it bends the cost curve, it covers 30 million Americans who don't have health insurance, and it has extraordinary insurance reforms in there that make sure that we're preventing abuse.

By the way, it also does things that Tom Harkin has been a champion of for years: prevention and wellness, to make sure that people are getting the care they need and the checkups they need and the screenings they need before they get sick, which will save all of us money and reduce pressures on emergency rooms all across the country.

So there are still disagreements that have to be ironed out. There is still work to be done in the next few days. I think it's important for every single Member of the Senate to take a careful look at what's in the bill.

We welcome the scrutiny from the press. Recently there was an article in the New Yorker that talked about all the cost savings and how important they are going to be in terms of bending the cost curve over the long term.

I am absolutely confident that if the American people know what's in this bill and if the Senate knows what's in this bill that this is going to pass, because it's right for America. And I'm feeling cautiously optimistic that we can get this done and start rolling up our sleeves and getting to work improving the lives of the American people.

All right. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Health care reform, meeting with Senate Democrats.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Harkin, Thomas R.

*Subjects:* AARP; Budget, Federal : Deficit; Congress : Congressional Budget Office; Congress : Members, meetings with President; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Health and medical care : Preventive care and public health programs.

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