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Barack Obama

Address to the Nation on Health Care Bill Passage



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Good evening, everybody. Tonight, after nearly 100 years of talk and frustration, after decades of trying, and a year of sustained effort and debate, the United States Congress finally declared that America's workers and America's families and America's small businesses deserve the security of knowing that here, in this country, neither illness nor accident should endanger the dreams they've worked a lifetime to achieve.

Tonight, at a time when the pundits said it was no longer possible, we rose above the weight of our politics. We pushed back on the undue influence of special interests. We didn't give in to mistrust or to cynicism or to fear. Instead, we proved that we are still a people capable of doing big things and tackling our biggest challenges. We proved that this government -- a government of the people and by the people -- still works for the people.

I want to thank every member of Congress who stood up tonight with courage and conviction to make health care reform a reality. And I know this wasn't an easy vote for a lot of people. But it was the right vote. I want to thank Speaker Nancy Pelosi for her extraordinary leadership, and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Majority Whip Jim Clyburn for their commitment to getting the job done. I want to thank my outstanding Vice President, Joe Biden, and my wonderful Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, for their fantastic work on this issue. I want to thank the many staffers in Congress, and my own incredible staff in the White House, who have worked tirelessly over the past year with Americans of all walks of life to forge a reform package finally worthy of the people we were sent here to serve.



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Today's vote answers the dreams of so many who have fought for this reform. To every unsung American who took the time to sit down and write a letter or type out an e-mail hoping your voice would be heard -- it has been heard tonight. To the untold numbers who knocked on doors and made phone calls, who organized and mobilized out of a firm conviction that change in this country comes not from the top down, but from the bottom up -- let me reaffirm that conviction: This moment is possible because of you.

Most importantly, today's vote answers the prayers of every American who has hoped deeply for something to be done about a health care system that works for insurance companies, but not for ordinary people. For most Americans, this debate has never been about abstractions, the fight between right and left, Republican and Democrat -- it's always been about something far more personal. It's about every American who knows the shock of opening an envelope to see that their premiums just shot up again when times are already tough enough. It's about every parent who knows the desperation of trying to cover a child with a chronic illness only to be told "no" again and again and again. It's about every small business owner forced to choose between insuring employees and staying open for business. They are why we committed ourselves to this cause.

Tonight's vote is not a victory for any one party -- it's a victory for them. It's a victory for the American people. And it's a victory for common sense.

Now, it probably goes without saying that tonight's vote will give rise to a frenzy of instant analysis. There will be tallies of Washington winners and losers, predictions about what it means for Democrats and Republicans, for my poll numbers, for my administration. But long after the debate fades away and the prognostication fades away and the dust settles, what will remain standing is not the government-run system some feared, or the status quo that serves the interests of the insurance industry, but a health care system that incorporates ideas from both parties -- a system that works better for the American people.

If you have health insurance, this reform just gave you more control by reining in the worst excesses and abuses of the insurance industry with some of the toughest consumer protections this country has ever known -- so that you are actually getting what you pay for.

If you don't have insurance, this reform gives you a chance to be a part of a big purchasing pool that will give you choice and competition and cheaper prices for insurance. And it includes the largest health care tax cut for working families and small businesses in history -- so that if you lose your job and you change jobs, start that new business, you'll finally be able to purchase quality, affordable care and the security and peace of mind that comes with it.

This reform is the right thing to do for our seniors. It makes Medicare stronger and more solvent, extending its life by almost a decade. And it's the right thing to do for our future. It will reduce our deficit by more than \$100 billion over the next decade, and more than \$1 trillion in the decade after that.



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So this isn't radical reform. But it is major reform. This legislation will not fix everything that ails our health care system. But it moves us decisively in the right direction. This is what change looks like.

Now as momentous as this day is, it's not the end of this journey. On Tuesday, the Senate will take up revisions to this legislation that the House has embraced, and these are revisions that have strengthened this law and removed provisions that had no place in it. Some have predicted another siege of parliamentary maneuvering in order to delay adoption of these improvements. I hope that's not the case. It's time to bring this debate to a close and begin the hard work of implementing this reform properly on behalf of the American people. This year, and in years to come, we have a solemn responsibility to do it right.

Nor does this day represent the end of the work that faces our country. The work of revitalizing our economy goes on. The work of promoting private sector job creation goes on. The work of putting American families' dreams back within reach goes on. And we march on, with renewed confidence, energized by this victory on their behalf.

In the end, what this day represents is another stone firmly laid in the foundation of the American Dream. Tonight, we answered the call of history as so many generations of Americans have before us. When faced with crisis, we did not shrink from our challenge -- we overcame it. We did not avoid our responsibility -- we embraced it. We did not fear our future -- we shaped it.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.