

Healthcare action now!

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In his recent address to Congress, President Obama made what many consider his most passionate speech, urging law makers to put aside the 'bickering', to think about the American people and make a push for real health care reform. Despite the disrespect shown by South Carolina Rep. Joe Wilson, a Republican, during the speech, the President was able to maintain his composure and his focus. He's serious about changing the way health care is provided in this country.

So much so that he's been willing to listen to and address the concerns of insurance companies worried about their bottom line. The time for arguing whether or not reform will work has past. Congress needs to heed the President's advice and begin the difficult task of building and passing a plan that serves the needs of the people. Action is indeed needed.

The number of Americans without health insurance rose to 46.3 million last year as the economy forced people out of jobs and away from employer sponsored health benefits. Among those fortunate enough to work, nearly 1 in 5 are uninsured. 20 percent of those who go without insurance are children and nearly half are below the age of 30. The majority are people of color.

The President's health care plan, which he detailed in his speech, would change the way health insurance is offered in this country. Private companies would no longer be able to deny coverage because pre-existing conditions, limits on the amount of coverage individuals can receive in a given year or over their lifetime life time would be eliminated and insurers would be required to cover routine checkups, such as mammograms and colonoscopies. The President also supports a public health care option, where individuals can choose a health plan outside of the one their employer offers, and mandatory coverage for everyone.

The President estimates it will cost \$900 billion to put the plan into effect. But we should not focus on cost here. The U.S. health care system is already the world's most expensive and is considered by many one of the most wasteful. With all that we spend now, so many go without coverage or are covered by policies that don't take care of all of their health needs. Hospitalization or a serious illness can mean financial ruin for some under the current system.

Is this plan perfect? That remains to be seen. What is clear is that is the most thought out and comprehensive option that has been presented. It takes into consideration the needs of the average person and the big corporations. It balances public and private. It is what we need at this moment in time.

Take action: call your legislators and urge that they support the President's plan. Call them, no matter what party they represent; they need to know that their constituents want health care reform. Go online to find your legislative contact info at www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml .