

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT
ON HEALTH CARE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Diplomatic Reception Room

1:42 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Hello. Good afternoon, everybody. You know that I am from Chicago, so let me first say that with the place where I live covered with snow I'm finally starting to feel like home. And I am sorry to drag you guys out in this weather, but I wanted to speak briefly to you about the significant progress that we've made on two of the major challenges facing the American people: the crushing cost of health care and our dangerous dependence on fossil fuels.

On health care, with today's developments it now appears that the American people will have the vote they deserve on genuine reform that offers security to those who have health insurance and affordable options to those for do not. And so I want to thank Senator Harry Reid and every senator who's been working around the clock to make this happen.

There's still much work left to be done, but not a lot of time left to do it. But today is a major step forward for the American people. After a nearly century long struggle we are on the cusp of making health care reform a reality in the United States of America.

As with any legislation, compromise is part of the process. But I'm pleased that recently added amendments have made this landmark bill even stronger. Between the time the bill passes and the time when the insurance exchange gets up and running there will now be penalties for insurance companies that arbitrarily jack up rates on consumers. And while insurance companies will be prevented from denying coverage on the basis of pre-existing conditions once the exchange is open, in the meantime there

will be a high risk pool where people with pre-existing conditions can purchase affordable coverage.

And a recent amendment has made these protections even stronger. Insurance companies will now be prohibited from denying coverage to children immediately after this bill passes. There's also explicit language in this bill that will protect a patient's choice of doctor. And small businesses will get additional assistance as well.

These protections are in addition to the ones we've been talking about for some time. No longer will insurance companies be able to drop your coverage if you become sick and no longer will you have to pay unlimited amounts out of your own pocket for treatments that you need.

Under this bill families will save on their premiums; businesses that will see their costs rise if we don't act will save money now and in the future. This bill will strengthen Medicare and extend the life of the program. Because it's paid for and gets rid of waste and inefficiency in our health care system this will be the largest deficit reduction plan in over a decade. In fact, we just learned from the Congressional Budget Office that this bill will reduce our deficit by \$132 billion over the first decade of the program, and more than one trillion dollars in the decade after that.

Finally, this reform will make coverage affordable for over 30 million Americans who don't have it -- over 30 million Americans.

As I said before, these are not small changes. These are big changes. They're fundamental reforms. They will save money. They will save lives. And I look forward to working with the Senate and the House to finish the work that remains so that we can make this reform a reality for the American people.

I also want to briefly mention the progress we made in Copenhagen yesterday. For the first time in history all of the major -- the world's major economies have come together to accept their responsibility to take action to confront the threat of climate change. After extremely difficult and complex negotiations this important breakthrough lays the foundation for international action in the years to come.

This progress did not come easily and we know that progress on this particular aspect of climate change negotiations is not enough. Going forward we're going to have to build on the momentum that we established in Copenhagen to ensure that international action to significantly reduce emissions is sustained and sufficient over time.

At home, that means continuing our efforts to build a clean energy economy that has the potential to create millions of new jobs and new industries. And it means passing legislation that will create the incentives necessary to spark this clean energy revolution.

So even though we have a long way to go, there's no question that we've accomplished a great deal over the last few days. And I want America to continue to lead on this journey, because if America leads in developing clean energy, we will lead in growing our economy and putting our people back to work, and leaving a stronger and more secure country to our children. That's why I went to Copenhagen yesterday and that's why I will continue in these efforts in the weeks and months to come.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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1:45 P.M. EST