

Remarks by the President on the Affordable Care Act - September 26, 2013

Prince George's Community College
Largo, Maryland

THE PRESIDENT:

Well, it is great to be with all of you here today --

...

So I wanted to take a little bit of time today to speak with you -- the people who send us to serve -- about something that is critical to our families, critical to our businesses, critical to our economy. And that is the reforms that we are making to our health care system.

...there are few things more fundamental to the economic security of the middle class and everybody who's trying to get into the middle class than health care.

For a long time, America was the only advanced economy in the world where health care was not a right, but a privilege. We spent more, we got less. We left tens of millions of Americans without the security of health insurance. By the time the financial crisis hit, most folks' premiums had more than doubled in about a decade. About one in 10 Americans who got their health care through their employer lost that coverage. So the health care system was not working...

But this has always been about more than just statistics. Everywhere I went as I ran for President back in 2007, 2008, everyplace I've gone as President, I would hear stories from folks just like you of insurers that denied a child coverage because he had a preexisting condition like asthma; of cancer survivors that had to choose between their home or their health care; of small businesses who wanted to do the right thing by their employees but had seen their insurance premiums go up so high that they just couldn't do it anymore.

And these stories were personal for me, because I remember my mother worrying about how she was going to deal with her finances when she got very sick. I remember the fear Michelle and I felt when Sasha was a few months old and she got meningitis. And we raced to the hospital and they had to give her a spinal tap. And we didn't know what was wrong and we were terrified, never felt so scared or helpless in all of my life. But we were fortunate enough to have good health insurance.

And I remember looking around that emergency room and thinking -- what about the parents who aren't that lucky? What about the parents who get hit with a bill of \$20,000 or \$30,000 and they've got no idea how to pay for it? What about those parents whose kids have a chronic illness like asthma and have to keep on going back to the emergency room because they don't have a regular doctor, and the bills never stop coming? Who is going to stand up for them?

In the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one should go broke just because they get sick.

In the United States of America, health care is not a privilege for the fortunate few -- it is a right. And I knew that if we didn't do something about our unfair and inefficient health care system, it

would keep driving up our deficits, it would keep burdening our businesses, it would keep hurting our families, and it would keep holding back economic growth.

That's why we took on a broken health care system...That's why we are going to see it through. The Affordable Care Act is here.

...If you're one of over 40 million Americans who don't have health insurance — including hundreds of thousands of folks right here in Maryland — starting on Tuesday, five days from now, you'll finally have the same chance to buy quality, affordable health care as everybody else.

And I want to break this down for you. I want you to know exactly how it works. The major reason why people don't have health insurance is either they don't have a job, or they do have a job but their employer doesn't offer health insurance, or they're self-employed. If you've ever tried to buy health insurance on your own, you know it is really, really expensive.

It's even worse if you have a preexisting condition — and up to half of all Americans have a preexisting condition. See, the reason it's really expensive if you're buying it on your own is because you're not part of a big group, you're not part of a group plan. And what groups do is they spread risk between sick and healthy people, between older and younger people. And groups -- because insurance companies want the business of groups -- that's a lot of customers -- they'll negotiate a better deal with a group than they will with an individual.

So if you're on your own, you're out there trying to negotiate with an insurance company, they're looking and they're saying, well, you take it or leave it, I'm going to charge you a whole lot of money. And if you've got a preexisting condition, they'll say, we don't even want to insure you because we think you might get sick later on and we don't really want to pay, we just want to take in premiums.

So if you're not part of a group, you're either uninsurable, or you need to spend a small fortune on insurance that oftentimes is not very good. That's what's happening right now. The Affordable Care Act was designed to solve that problem.

And here's another thing about these new plans. If you're one of those folks who has a preexisting condition, these plans have to offer you coverage. They can't use your medical history to charge you more than anybody else. If you couldn't afford coverage for your child because he had asthma, he's covered. If you couldn't afford coverage because you were told heartburn was a preexisting condition, you're covered. If you're one of the 45 million Americans with a mental illness, you are covered.

If you're a young adult or entrepreneur striking out on your own, you're covered. If you're a young couple who previously had insurance that didn't include maternity benefits and now suddenly you need some maternity benefits, you're covered. If you lose your job and your health care with it, you're covered.

So all those things that would deny you coverage in the past, that were the cruelties of a broken health care system, on January 1st, when these plans take effect — all those things change forever...