

Subcommittee on Health hearing entitled, "America's Need for Health Reform."

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September 18, 2008

I commend Subcommittee Chairman Pallone for holding this hearing today and I thank our esteemed panel of witnesses for joining us. We are here to consider the current status of health care coverage in our country, to examine the successes and failures of our national health care system, and to identify the problems that need to be addressed.

Today we will specifically focus on the role of employer-sponsored coverage, the individual insurance market, the role of public programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program, State's perspectives on health care coverage, and the growing number of uninsured Americans. Perhaps most important, we will lay the foundation for future discussions on health care reform. Next year will bring new opportunities to repair and strengthen our health care system, and today's witnesses will provide valuable insight to help Members focus our efforts as we look ahead to 2009.

In many ways, our health care system is the best in the world. Yet too many Americans do not have access to quality care, and many who have access still face financial ruin due to inadequate coverage. It's nothing short of a disgrace that here, in the world's wealthiest country, 47 million people are without health coverage. Nearly nine million of them are children. Most adults without health insurance are working full-time, but have jobs that do not provide insurance.

Unfortunately, for nearly eight years our President has done little to help the growing pool of uninsured and underinsured Americans. And this Administration has fought nearly every effort to improve or extend coverage for our youngest, oldest, poorest and most vulnerable.

In 1993, the last time our country launched a serious reform effort, health care spending was 14 percent of our GDP. Today it's nearly 17

percent.

Annual insurance premiums for a family of four now average more than \$12,000. Half of all bankruptcies in our country are the result of medical expenses.

Our current health care system isn't just morally indefensible, it's also economically untenable. Some of our largest corporations simply can't compete with foreign companies based in countries with universal health care.

It's been sixty years since President Truman issued the first call for a national health care plan. In 1942, my father, John Dingell, Sr., tried to answer Truman's call by introducing the National Health Insurance Act in the House of Representatives. And I have carried on Pop's work, opening each Congressional session by introducing a bill to provide every American with health insurance.

Though we have not moved forward as far or as quickly as I would have liked, we have made significant progress, chiefly by creating programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and SCHIP. These programs have allowed millions of Americans to enjoy better health and feel more financially secure.

In 2009, we must build on these efforts. Next year, there will be new opportunities for reform. Not only because we will have a new Administration, but also because support for comprehensive reform has become widespread, and a diverse group of business and health industry leaders are now calling for change.

Today's witnesses will help us determine how we can make sure our health care system works for all Americans. I look forward to hearing from them. I also welcome our visitors and guests today. We are pleased you are here and thank you for being part of this worthy endeavor.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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