

Introduction of the Medicare for All Act

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

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April 25, 2007

I am proud to join with Senator Kennedy today in introducing legislation that will provide every American with access to quality, affordable healthcare coverage.

There are currently two very different pictures of our national healthcare system. On one hand, it can be characterized by great success. We have some of the world's finest medical institutions and best trained medical professionals. We have state-of-the-art facilities where life-saving technologies have been and continue to be developed.

But there is another side to this story -- and it is one of unconscionable failings and missed opportunities.

It is a disgrace that in the wealthiest and most prosperous country on the planet, more than 46 million Americans under age 65 are uninsured. Each year, this number continues to rise, as more working Americans lose access to private health insurance and more employers are forced to cut benefits.

Though we spend nearly \$2 trillion on healthcare annually, more than 18,000 Americans die prematurely each year because they lack health insurance coverage and cannot afford the costs of doctor visits and life-saving medicines.

How many more illnesses and injuries will have to go undiagnosed and untreated? How many more heart disease patients will have to skimp on their medicines? How many more asthmatic children will struggle to breathe? How many cancer victims will die from undetected tumors before we in Congress come together to protect them?

Even those who don't suffer medical consequences face financial and emotional difficulties. Seniors should not have to choose between prescriptions and groceries. And working families should not have to choose between the mortgage payments and hospital bills.

The gaps in our national safety net have become too large to ignore. We can do more to provide access to quality, affordable healthcare coverage. And we must not delay.

That's why, today, I join with Senator Kennedy in introducing the Medicare for All Act. This legislation will expand Medicare, one of our most effective entitlement programs, so that children and families can receive the care they need to stay healthy.

With this bill, Medicare will be available to everyone under age 65. Americans will also have the option of selecting any of the plans offered to members of Congress, the President, and federal employees or keep what they have today. People

with lower incomes will continue to receive extra help with cost sharing and premiums in order to access Medicare services.

Not only will covering all Americans improve millions of lives, it will actually save money by reducing emergency room costs and increasing access to prevention services and earlier treatments. We will all reap the benefits of a healthier nation, a stronger economy and lower health insurance costs.

As I see it, we can't afford not to make insuring every American a top priority. And I thank Senator Kennedy, and all of our co-sponsors, for joining me in supporting the Medicare for All Act.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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