

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Health hearing entitled "Living Without Health Insurance: Why Every American Needs Coverage"

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH HEARING ENTITLED "LIVING WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE:
WHY EVERY AMERICAN NEEDS COVERAGE"
April 25, 2007

Thank you to each of the witnesses for joining us here today to have this very important conversation as we observe the annual "Week of the Uninsured." Unfortunately over the past decade, this conversation has not prodded the Congress to act on even incremental solutions. But beyond that, as a Nation it seems we haven't come to consensus on the need for universal coverage in this country. But I believe that is changing.

There are 46.1 million Americans who are without health insurance. Eighty percent of these people come from working families. The erosion of employer-sponsored coverage threatens more people's coverage every day. Total annual health insurance premiums now exceed the annual salary for a full-time minimum wage worker. Medical debt is the cause of more than 50 percent of bankruptcies each year in this country. And worst of all, 18,000 annual deaths are attributed to lack of health insurance and access to care.

We live in a country that spends 1.9 trillion dollars a year on health care; that is 16 percent of our gross domestic product. We have some of the best medical institutions and practices in the world. But we continue to rank 22nd in average life expectancy and 25th in infant mortality.

To be uninsured means getting fewer and less appropriate medical services, and greater development risks, particularly children. It means healthcare providers do not have a reliable source of reimbursement for their services and those who treat high numbers of uncompensated care patients are at risk of closing, leaving communities with a threadbare safety net to care for these uninsured people. The uninsured weaken a productive workforce and cost those with employer-sponsored health insurance on average \$922 more each year.

My father introduced legislation that would provide universal health insurance to all Americans during his years in Congress and I have kept that commitment to the uninsured, introducing H.R.15 each Congress, as well. In addition, today I am reintroducing the "Medicare for All Act" with my good friend Senator Kennedy. This bill brings the promise of a quality affordable health insurance program to all Americans.

This year is also the 10th anniversary of the State Children's Health Insurance Program "and its end, unless we in Congress reauthorize the Act. Before us are two important tasks that will ensure that health care is available to all Americans. It is time for action and I look forward to today's hearing on this very important topic.

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