

Consumer Voices for Coverage Telephone Press Conference

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Statement of Jeffrey Brenner, MD

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As a frontline provider for the last ten years in the City of Camden, I've seen the human toll of our broken healthcare system. I've seen mothers with cancer that gets diagnosed late, I've seen fathers with uncontrolled blood pressure who have a stroke, and families torn apart from the financial stress of no insurance. I've watched grandparents skip pills as they run out of medicine. I've watched depression relapse and patients descend into deeper despair. I've watched children get dumped off of insurance plans and lose access to their asthma medicine. How much longer will our nation tolerate this disgrace? We are the only modern, wealthy, industrialized country that does not provide health insurance to all of its citizens.

Many residents of New Jersey who have insurance assume that health care reform is not their problem. Unfortunately, it's not true. The increasing cost of health care for residents and businesses in the State of New Jersey is unsustainable and will increasingly impact the middle class. In the years to come, more and more New Jersey residents will see their employer drop insurance or increase deductibles and co-payments. It will also threaten our nation's long-term economic well being. We cannot compete in a global economy with unsustainable health care costs built into every product we try to sell abroad. The status quo is not acceptable.

The first step to controlling costs is covering every citizen. When an uninsured patient collapses after a heart attack because of untreated diabetes and high blood pressure, we all pay the bill. When an uninsured patient gets cancer that could have been prevented, we all pay the bill. When an uninsured child is hospitalized for untreated asthma, we all pay the bill. We pay through overcrowded emergency rooms and cost shifting. Either through charity care or increases in private insurance payments, we all ultimately pay the bill. Getting control of healthcare costs requires that we start by covering all citizens.

Strong national health care reform is the best opportunity we will have to expand coverage, improve quality, and reduce cost. I strongly urge residents of New Jersey to take a look at the plans proposed in Congress and earlier this week by President Obama. All three contains commonsense insurance reforms, subsidies to help residents purchase insurance, and begin the process of decreasing healthcare spending.