

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
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**Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman**  
**Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Health Care Reform Draft Proposal, Day 2**  
**June 24, 2009**

In February, President Obama called upon the Congress to enact legislation to reform America's health care system.

In April, Governor Kathleen Sebelius was sworn in as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Her Department has the lead responsibility for improving the health of the American people.

Last Friday, I joined with Chairman Rangel and Chairman Miller, and Chairman Emeritus Dingell to propose a discussion draft on health reform.

This morning we have the honor of hearing Secretary Sebelius present the Administration's views on the discussion draft.

Based on her contributions today, and on what we will hear and learn from the 50 stakeholders appearing before the Health Subcommittee this week, and on the input of the Members, we will revise the discussion draft and introduce a bill for consideration by the three committees.

Our legislation will reduce health care costs, it will cover all Americans, it will improve the quality of care, and it will be fully paid for.

The lead sponsor will be John Dingell, Chairman Emeritus of this Committee, who has faithfully carried on his father's legacy as an undisputed leader in the struggle for health reform.

I want to emphasize a few important points about the discussion draft.

First, it is just that — a draft for discussion. We are seeking input from the Administration and others because we want to improve the draft before introducing legislation.

Second, the draft builds on what works in our uniquely American system:

- It builds on the employer-based system for providing health coverage to workers and their dependents.
- It relies on and improves Medicare as the source of health coverage for the elderly.
- It builds upon Medicaid to extend coverage to low-income Americans.

Third, the draft fixes what is broken.

- It fixes the broken individual health insurance market by creating a new insurance Exchange through which uninsured Americans can enroll in their choice of health care plan. Those who cannot afford to purchase the coverage available in the Exchange will receive assistance.
- A public option will be available within the insurance Exchange to give consumers an alternative to private health insurers for their health care coverage. This public option will be self-supporting and will not receive ongoing subsidies from the federal government.
- The draft contains provisions to reduce rural, racial, and ethnic disparities in disease incidence and treatment.
- The draft fixes the broken Medicare physician payment system and prevents the irrational cuts that are scheduled under current law from going into effect.
- The draft takes the steps necessary to fix the shortage of primary care practitioners and nurses and other practitioners.

Finally, the draft ensures that people have choice — choice of doctors, choice of benefits packages, and choice among insurance plans.

This approach — build on what works, fix what's broken, and make sure people have choices — is pragmatic, and it will produce the results the nation's health care system so desperately needs: lower costs, broader coverage, and better quality.

Today we continue a journey that began over 100 years ago to provide health insurance for all Americans.

Some of our greatest Presidents of the 20th century — Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman — were advocates for health insurance for all Americans.

President Clinton fought hard for his Administration's proposal.

Those initiatives may have failed, but the hope that inspired them was never defeated.

The time has finally come to redeem that hope, and to deliver true health reform.

In my conversations with my colleagues and my constituents, I am getting the clear sense that there is now a willingness to tackle the issues, resolve them, and bring forward a much better health care system for all Americans.

With President Obama in the White House, we now have the best opportunity ever to enact health reform.

I am determined that we not let this opportunity slip from our grasp.

I look forward to this morning's testimony, and continuing with urgent pragmatism to send health reform legislation to the President for his signature this year.