

WASHINGTON, DC – House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (MD) opened debate on health reform tonight. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery: Click [here](#) to watch the video. □

“We are here to conclude a day of debate, which concludes months of debate in a national conversation that began more than a century ago. But this much is beyond debate: American health care is on an unsustainable course. By the end of this debate, another family will have fallen into bankruptcy because someone had the bad fortune to be sick. More families will have joined them in paying more and more for less and less health coverage. More businesses will have weighed bankruptcy against cutting their workers’ care—and their workers will have lost. “We have before us a bill to change an unsustainable course. Through more than 3,000 district events, more than 100 hearings, and almost two years of public argument, health insurance reform has stood up to scrutiny, to criticism, to falsehood. But its purpose is older than that: before we were born, the task of bringing affordable health care to every American was on our nation’s agenda, waiting for this day.

“In 2002, George W. Bush said: ‘All Americans should be able to choose a health care plan that meets their needs at affordable prices.’ George W. Bush was right.

“In 1976, Gerald Ford spoke of ‘our effort to upgrade and perpetuate...our total health care system so no individual in this country will lack help whenever or wherever he needs it.’ Gerald Ford was right.

“And Richard Nixon said: ‘Let us act now—in 1974—to assure all Americans financial access to high quality medical care.’ Richard Nixon was right. Let us act now—in 2010.

“Affordable health care for all Americans was embraced by both parties’ nominees in the last campaign, Senator Obama and Senator McCain.

“But what a campaign of fear this bill has faced this last year! Its critics call it, without justification, a ‘government takeover.’ It is not. It is more control for consumers, and less for insurance companies. It is the end of discrimination against Americans with pre-existing conditions, and the end of medical bankruptcy and caps on benefits. It is coverage you can rely on whether you lose your job or become your own boss—coverage that reaches 95% of Americans.

“Its critics call this ‘tyranny.’ There is none. It is a free, competitive, transparent marketplace where individuals and small businesses can pool together to buy private insurance at low rates. It is lower costs for the middle class and an end to the prescription drug ‘donut hole’ for seniors.

“Its critics mock this as ‘out-of-control government.’ In truth, it is the biggest deficit-reducer since the Clinton budgets of the 1990s that ushered in a budget surplus and historic prosperity. According to the nonpartisan CBO, this bill is \$143 billion in savings in the first decade and more than \$1 trillion in the second decade. And we can add to those deficit savings real cost controls that bring down the price of the world’s most expensive health care: take those into account, says leading health care economist David Cutler, and America saves an additional \$600 billion in the first ten years, and even more in the second ten years.

“And yet there are some who hope for this bill’s defeat. They would see that as the defeat of one party; but it would be a defeat for our country. They saw the same thing in 1993, when, to a person, Republicans voted against President Clinton’s economic program. Congressman Boehner asked: ‘Who does this spending stimulate except maybe the liberal faculty at Harvard or Berkeley?’ Congressman Kasich said: ‘If it was to work, then I’d have to become a

Democrat.’

“It was a partisan vote, Madam Speaker—a partisan vote that helped create 22.7 million new jobs and a record budget surplus.

“That bill passed through a gauntlet of slurs, hyperbole, and untruths; and so did Medicare, which Republicans called ‘brazen socialism’; and so did Social Security, which a Republican Congressman called ‘the lash of the dictator.’

“Those slurs were false in 1935; they were false in 1965; they are false in 2010. And this bill will stand in the same company—for the misguided outrage of its opposition, and for its lasting accomplishment for the American people.

“In closing, I want to honor some of the ‘little punk staffers’ who gave so much to bring us here: from the Legislative Counsel’s office, Ed Grossman, Jessica Shapiro, Megan Renfrew, Warren Burke, Larry Johnston, Henry Christrup, Wade Ballou, Scott Probst. I also want to honor the tireless staffs of the House Committees on Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, Education and Labor, Rules, and the Budget, as well as the staff of the CBO—Doug Elmendorf, Holly Harvey, Phil Ellis, Kate Massey, Pete Fontaine, and the whole CBO health care team—along with Tom Barthold and everyone on the staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation who contributed to their estimates. And finally, two remarkable ‘punk’ staffers in my office have made health reform the cause of their lives and just about every one of their waking hours for months on end: Liz Murray and Ed Lorenzen.

“One of my staff members has a four-year-old daughter, Colette. A few days ago, a neighbor asked Colette where her mom was. I’m told she answered, ‘She’s at work making sure everyone can go see the doctor.’

“I know that this bill is complicated. It’s also very simple. Illness and infirmity are universal, and we are stronger against them together than alone. Our bodies may fail us. Our neighbors don’t have to.

“In that shared strength is our nation’s strength. And in this bill is a more prosperous, more just future: a fiscal and moral future we can be proud to hand our children.”

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