

Although President Obama fully acknowledged in his State of the Union Address that the American people are deeply concerned about the economy, unemployment, and the growing costs of education he made it perfectly clear that he is not yet ready to abandon comprehensive health care reform. The President emphatically stated that as he begins his second term in office, he wants to stick to his core principles and tackle the rising costs of health care and the discrimination by insurance companies against millions of individuals with preexisting health conditions.

Despite the serious economic challenges that the country faces, the President vowed not to abandon the people who are hurt most by the economic downturn. The President expressed compassion for those whose stories he has heard “from Americans with preexisting conditions whose lives depend on getting coverage; patients who've been denied coverage; families — even those with insurance — who are just one illness away from financial ruin.” While it is perfectly clear that this year the President’s priorities will focus on a job creation bill and education reform, the Obama administration continues its commitment to his core principles of universal high-quality affordable health care. President Obama will continue to fight hard for legislation that simultaneously lowers health care costs and extends coverage to almost 50 million uninsured Americans, especially to those who need it most. At the same time, the President assured Americans who already have coverage that they will be able to keep it.

Although the President recognizes that it is critical to preserve and strengthen the nation’s health care system he recognizes that paying for the costs of health care for all Americans while reducing the debt will be difficult. Despite President Obama’s good intentions and the bid for bipartisan support, the lack of political will in Congress means that many individuals will be left uninsured. In particular Hispanics, who have the lowest rates of coverage of any group in the country, will continue to suffer. Generations long disadvantages in education and the labor force leave Hispanics, and especially Mexican Americans, at serious risk of falling through the health care safety net. The fact that Hispanics will make up a large fraction of the labor force in the years to come make this health policy failure a serious national problem, especially as the baby boom generations begin receiving Social Security and Medicare. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the “federal budget is on an unsustainable path, primarily because of the rising cost of health care combined with the aging of the baby boomer population.” Health care spending now accounts for 17 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), a total of \$2.6 trillion in 2009. That figure is expected to grow to 20 percent by 2017.

As the great debate on health care financing reform continues it is clear there are no simple solutions to the problems associated with these gaps in health insurance coverage and the particularly serious problems that affect Hispanics. True comprehensive health care reform would address the health insurance vulnerability of the Hispanic population, as well as that of other vulnerable Americans, but as this most recent debate in Washington reminds us, such reform faces monumental political hurdles. In

the end comprehensive reform has always turned out to be incremental reform. It is imperative for the future labor force and for the welfare of the country that such incremental reform eventually guarantee the optimal health of everyone.

**For more information about this issue see *Hispanic Families at Risk: the New Economy, Work, and the Welfare States.*” [www.utexas.edu/lbj/caa](http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/caa)**

