

We've Come a Long Way: Obama Says Medicare for All Is a "Good New Idea"

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On September 7, 2018, speaking at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, [President Obama said](#) that Democrats are running on "good new ideas like Medicare for All..."

This indicates a significant shift in support of National Improved Medicare for All (NIMA). President Obama is campaigning for Democrats in the mid-terms and his public support for NIMA right at the start shows how far we have come and that we have a real opportunity to win in the next few years.

Eight years ago when President Obama was pushing through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) he asked in his State of the Union whether anyone had "a better idea." The next day I attempted to deliver a letter to the president describing a "better idea" – National Improved Medicare for All. They refused to accept the letter so when he came to Baltimore, Carol Paris, MD and I stood outside the meeting holding a sign saying "A Better Idea: Medicare for All" and attempted to deliver the letter to Obama again. We were arrested. See the letter and the video of our attempts to deliver it below.

We have come a long way, and we appreciate Obama's support. His support for National Improved Medicare for All is a turning point moment — it is no longer about defending the ACA, it is about putting in place the real solution to the US health crisis.

It is also significant that Democrats, including President Obama, are not campaigning on fixing the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which was their message over the past two years. When Democrats said, "Fix the ACA," the grassroots response was, "We want Medicare for All." We are being heard.

Polls are also reflecting majority support for Medicare for All, with 85% of Democrats in support and a majority of Republicans, 52%, in support. Opponents of Medicare for All are the minority. This popular support gives candidates more comfort in publicly advocating for Medicare for All and indicates that we are making progress.

We need to continue to educate the public about National Improved Medicare for All and keep mobilizing in support of NIMA. To win, we need to change the political environment so that NIMA is the only viable solution. We are on our way to victory.

Here is a recap of how I was received in 2009-10 as an advocate for NIMA. I am glad to see the progress that single payer supporters have made over the past eight years, and I am confident that if we keep building the movement of movements for single payer health care,

we will prevail.

During Obama's terms as President, advocates for NIMA were not welcome. In fact, we were largely excluded from the process and arrested for trying to be included. My first arrest was at the Senate Finance Committee hearing on health care when they refused to allow a proponent of single payer health care to testify.

In his 2010 State of the Union Speech, President Obama said that if anyone had a better idea for health reform, they should let him know.

"If anyone from either party has a better approach that will bring down premiums, bring down the deficit, cover the uninsured, strengthen Medicare for seniors and stop insurance company abuses, let me know. Let me know. Let me know. I'm eager to see it."

I was watching the State of the Union address and I immediately wrote the open letter below and went to the White House the next day to deliver it to him along with more information about national improved Medicare for all.

The White House security sent me away, but the next day, by luck, President Obama was coming to Baltimore Maryland, my city, to meet with Republican members of Congress. Dr. Carol Paris and I decided to try to get the message to him there.

We were arrested and questioned by the Secret Service.

We didn't give up, and today the movement for National Improved Medicare for All. Let's take a moment to celebrate this shift, and then get back to work of winning National Improved Medicare for All.

Here is the letter I tried to deliver to the President in January, 2010.

Dear President Obama,

I was overjoyed to hear you say in your State of the Union address last night:

"But if anyone from either party has a better approach that will bring down premiums, bring down the deficit, cover the uninsured, strengthen Medicare for seniors, and stop insurance company abuses, let me know."

My colleagues, fellow health advocates and I have been trying to meet with you for over a year now because we have an approach which will meet all of your goals and more.

I am a pediatrician who, like many of my primary care colleagues, left practice because it is nearly impossible to deliver high quality health care in this environment. I have been volunteering for Physicians for a National Health Program ever since. For over a year now, I have been working with the Leadership Conference for Guaranteed Health Care/ National Single Payer Alliance. This alliance represents over 20 million people nationwide from doctors to nurses to labor, faith and community groups who advocate on behalf of the majority of Americans, including doctors, who favor a national

Medicare for All health system.

I felt very optimistic when Congress took up health care reform last January because I remember when you spoke to the Illinois AFL-CIO in June, 2003 and said:

"I happen to be a proponent of a single payer universal health care program." (applause) "I see no reason why the United States of America, the wealthiest country in the history of the world, spending 14 percent of its Gross National Product on health care cannot provide basic health insurance to everybody. And that's what Jim is talking about when he says everybody in, nobody out. A single payer health care plan, a universal health care plan. And that's what I'd like to see."

But as all of you know, we may not get there immediately. Because first we have to take back the White House, we have to take back the Senate, and we have to take back the House."

And that is why I was so surprised when the voices of those who support a national single payer plan/Medicare for All were excluded in place of the voices of the very health insurance and pharmaceutical industries which profit off the current health care situation.

There was an opportunity this past year to create universal and financially-sustainable health care reform rather than expensive health insurance reform.

As you well know, the United States spends the most per capita on health care in the world yet leaves millions of people out and receives poor return on those health care dollars in terms of health outcomes and efficiency. This poor value for our health care dollar is due to the waste of having so many insurance companies. At least a third of our health care dollars go towards activities that have nothing to do with health care such as marketing, administration and high executive salaries and bonuses. This represents over \$400 billion per year which could be used to pay for health care for all of those Americans who are suffering and dying from preventable causes.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. You said that you wanted to "keep what works" and that would be Medicare. Medicare is an American legacy of which we can feel proud. It has guaranteed health security to all who have it. Medicare has lifted senior citizens out of poverty. Health disparities, which are rising in this nation, begin to disappear as soon as patients reach 65 years of age. And patients and doctors prefer Medicare to private insurance. Why, our Medicare has even been used as a model by other nations which have developed and implemented universal health systems.

Mr. President, we wanted to meet with you because we have the solution to health care reform. The United States has enough money already and we have the resources, including esteemed experts in public health, health policy and health financing. Our very own Dr. William Hsiao at Harvard has designed health systems in five other countries.

I am asking you to meet with me because the solution is simple. Remove all of the industries who profit off of the American health care catastrophe from the table. Replace them with those who are knowledgeable in designing health systems and who are without ties to the for-profit medical industries. And then allow them to design an improved Medicare for All national health system. We can implement it within a year of designing such a system.

What are the benefits of doing this?

- It will save tens of thousands (perhaps hundreds of thousands) of American lives each year, not to mention the prevention of unnecessary suffering.
- It will relieve families of medical debt, which is the number one cause of bankruptcy and foreclosure despite the fact that most of those who experienced bankruptcy had health insurance.
- It will relieve businesses of the growing burden of skyrocketing health insurance premiums so that they can invest in innovation, hiring, increased wages and other benefits and so they can compete in the global market. For example, it is estimated to provide a major stimulus for the U.S. economy by creating 2.6 million new jobs, and infusing \$317 billion in new business and public revenues, with another \$100 billion in wages.
- It will control health care costs in a rational way through global budgeting and negotiation for fair prices for pharmaceuticals and services.
- It will allow patients the freedom to choose wherever they want to go for health care and will allow patients and their caregivers to determine which care is best without denials by insurance administrators.
- It will restore the physician-patient relationship and bring satisfaction back to the practice of medicine so that more doctors will stay in or return to practice.
- It will allow our people in our nation to be healthy and productive and able to support themselves and their families.
- It will create a legacy for your administration that may someday elevate you to the same hero status as Tommy Douglas has in Canada.

Mr. President, there are more benefits, but I believe you get the point. I look forward to meeting with you and am so pleased that you are open to our ideas. The Medicare for All campaign is growing rapidly and is ready to support you as we move forward on health care reform that will provide America with one of the best health systems in the world. And that is something of which all Americans can be proud.

With great anticipation and deep respect,

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This article was originally published on [Health Over Profit](#).

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