

# Obama's health care address sparks controversy

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Health care reform has been a hot-button issue in most presidential elections, but President Obama plans to ensure all Americans will have access to health insurance without being limited by the private insurance sector, according to a speech he delivered to Congress on Sept. 9.

"I am not the first president to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last," Obama said.

Obama plans to enact a universal health care system where every American is insured, whether through their own private insurance company or the government-offered plan.

"There is something positive to be said that everyone has minimum basic access to health care, just as we say everyone has minimal basic access to education," said Shirley Browning, professor of economics.

In the new plan, the monthly premiums will be \$70 for an individual, \$140 for a couple, \$130 for a single parent family and \$200 for all other families.

Americans spend more on health care than on food or housing, according to the health care reform plan.

"How this will shake out in the long run in terms of personal or family debt, I don't know," Browning said. "For any given individual or any given family, it just depends on random luck."

The plan also allows young adults to remain on their parents' plan until the age of 25.

"Once we graduate, we don't have to worry about having another bill on top of rent, food and gas," said Pete Clausen, sophomore international studies student. "It will be one less thing for people who are probably already in debt coming out of college to worry about."

The United States spends \$2 trillion a year on health care, but 46 million people don't have health insurance, according to recent national statistics.

"The money goes to deliver health care, but obviously not every member of soci-

ety is receiving access to all levels of health care," Browning said.

The question is already being raised as to how much control the government will have over health care, according to supporters and opponents of the plan.

"(The government) is already there with Medicare," Browning said. "It's not like this is a brand new idea."

Some worry that the addition of a government-offered plan will drive out the private companies.

"(The plan is) designed to compete with the private sector to drive down costs, but really what it's going to do is cloud out the private sector and it will be the only option, which will end up raising costs," said Matthew Kauffmann, sophomore philosophy student and vice chair of the UNCA College Republicans.

The private sector will not be driven out because if those that already have an insurance company like it then they can keep their plan, according to the health care reform plan.

"Medicare and Medicaid certainly have not eliminated the private sector," Browning said.

Some believe that insurance companies have too much control.

"The insurance companies are already controlling people's health," Clausen said. "It's about time the government got involved with everyone's general health."

The plan has proven to be controversial, with both sides of the political spectrum weighing in with their opinions.

"There are two fundamental reasons why I think this plan is controversial," said William Sabo, political science professor. "The first is when you are talking about health care, you're talking about a fundamental aspect of people's lives. The second is that you're talking about a dramatic change."

Some say the president is trying to turn the nation into a socialist country.

"That criticism resonates with lots of people, and it's a very simple way of packaging a complex argument," Sabo said.

Some said they predict government-off-

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***"When you are talking about health care, you are talking about a fundamental aspect of people's lives." – political science professor Bill Sabo***

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ered health care will differ from the private sector.

"I think there is some degree of populist uproar about rationing health care, which you can't really get around," Kauffmann said. "We already ration health care on people's ability to pay."

Obama's plan promises to ensure the government-offered plan and public insurers will offer the same care to everyone.

If a private insurer withholds affordable care, they will be charged a fine, according to the health care reform plan.

"I believe it makes more sense to build on what works and fix what doesn't, rather than try to build on an entirely new system from scratch," Obama said in a speech to Congress.

Obama also plans to ensure that, if a person is laid off from their job or leaves their job, they will still be insured.

"We'll do this by creating a new insurance exchange – a marketplace where individuals and small businesses will be able to shop for health insurance at competitive prices," Obama said.

Obama guarantees it will be against the law for insurance companies to deny coverage because of a pre-existing condition, drop individuals once they become ill or place a cap on the amount of coverage.

"We will place a limit on how much you can be charged for out-of-pocket expenses because, in the United States of America, no one should go broke because they get sick," Obama said.

Despite differing opinions, most said they agree that some form of health care reform to the industry does need to happen.

"It's a government institution and we have a right to change it," Clausen said.

## Farrington

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education and prevention programming, and must be maintained and constantly updated, Haggard said.

"This isn't just a one-time deal. There's constant work that needs to be done, constant planning," he said. "We must be able to respond to current situations, like the current H1N1 situation. After H1N1 is over, history shows there will be something else."

Campus officials plan to start performing safety drills and exercises in preparation for various emergencies, Lewis said.

"We're talking about incorporating fire, EMS, police and even hospitals," he said. "And having someone in that position to coordinate and get these things into place, I feel, is a benefit to the university."

Haggard said the administration plans to incorporate emergency notification via text messages and sirens.

"There are still some bugs to work out in that system. And the reason that hasn't happened yet is we didn't have anyone who had the real time to dedicate to drilling that system down," he said.

Environmental safety and campus security's responsibilities overlap, and emergency management is the umbrella overseeing the two, Farrington said.

Farrington said she communicated with UNCA officials for several years in an attempt to start different disaster-planning and education programs.

"I am very involved with the University of Colorado at Boulder. They have an international think tank on emergency management, analyzing everything from climate change to tsunamis," she said. "In 2005, knowing that I wanted to come off the road with FEMA, I contacted the chief of staff and proposed UNCA have a similar think tank."

FEMA previously employed Farrington as a disaster assistance employee in the Southeast, where she helped with long-term recovery and training for mitigation of damages, she said.

Farrington said her job at UNCA differs from FEMA in scope, but the significance of responsibility remains the same.

"I hope the students here would know that there's an obligation at all levels for us to ensure each others safety," she said. "The primary role of that doesn't come at the time of the incident but comes before."



Shirley Browning



Bill Sabo