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President and Democrats Emphasize Commitment to Comprehensive Health Reform

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While there is uncertainty at this time about the next steps in the debate on comprehensive health reform, President Obama and congressional Democrats are continuing to emphasize their strong commitment to passing legislation.

On Tuesday, the President participated in a town hall meeting in Nashua, New Hampshire where he expressed concern about the burden health care costs are placing on families and small businesses. He stressed that he will “not walk away from these efforts” to achieve health reform. The President also emphasized the importance of having a comprehensive bill that links insurance market reforms to a coverage mandate. He explained: “If you had a situation where not everybody was covered but an insurance company had to take you because you were sick, what everybody would do is they'd just wait till they got sick and then they'd go buy insurance.”

On Wednesday, President Obama met with the Senate Democratic Caucus during its annual issues retreat, fielding questions from senators on a wide range of topics including health care, jobs, the economy, trade, and energy issues. The President reiterated his commitment to “finishing the job” on comprehensive health reform, while also emphasizing that he welcomes ideas from others and is open to compromise. The President stated: “I've talked to every health care expert out there and it turns out if you want to reform the insurance system, if you want to make sure that people with preexisting conditions are able to get insurance, if you want to provide coverage for people, if you want to bend the cost curve, then you need a comprehensive bill because this is a complicated area involving one-sixth of our economy.”

At a Senate Finance Committee hearing on the Administration's budget proposals, Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) stated that “we cannot give up the quest for health reform that addresses the interconnected problems of cost, quality, and access.” Noting that Congress has tried incremental reforms in the past, Baucus stated: “We've reached a point where it's increasingly difficult to fix the system one step at a time. We cannot add 46 million uninsured people to a broken health system. And we cannot meaningfully control the growth of health spending without covering the uninsured.”