

Obama: Statistics show need for overhauling health

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In this three photo combo, President Barack Obama speaks to a joint session of Congress on healthcare at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, on Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2009. (AP Photo/Jason Reed, pool)

(AP) -- Trumpeting nurses' support for a health care overhaul while lamenting a worsening toll of uninsured, President Barack Obama kept up the pressure Thursday for congressional action.

"We don't need more partisan distractions," Obama said in remarks at the White House, speaking again on the issue just 14 hours after his Wednesday night address to Congress and a national television audience. "We have talked this issue to death. ... The time for talk is winding down."

The White House event was organized with the American Nurses

Association, to showcase the group's backing for Obama's drive to revamp the nation's [health care](#) system. Obama says his plan would give people who have health insurance greater security, set up a marketplace for affordable access to coverage for those without and reduce health care costs for all.

Seeking to sweep away a summer of gridlock on his top domestic priority, Obama plans to remain in the spotlight on health care repeatedly over the coming days, appearing at a rally on Saturday in Minnesota and scheduling another speech for next Tuesday.

Before a crowd of cheering nurses in an office building adjoining the White House, Obama said that too many people are being cut off from coverage.

"It is heartbreaking and it is wrong and nobody should be treated that way in the United States of America. Nobody!" the president said. He also cited new Census statistics, released Thursday, showing that the number of uninsured has risen to 46.3 million from 45.7 million in 2007.

Vice President Joe Biden also toured the morning network news shows, saying the fights over details like a government-run option obscured a real bipartisan consensus for change.

"I think the most important thing he did, he also debunked a lot of the myths out there, the idea of death panels, that we were going to insure undocumented aliens," Biden said of Obama's Wednesday night speech. "I've been in the Congress for a very long time, eight presidents. I believe we will have a bill before Thanksgiving."

Sen. John McCain, also interviewed Thursday morning, said he agreed that something needs to be done about health care. But he also said that if the administration wants to see legislation realized, it must reach out

more aggressively to minority Republicans.

"We need to do it, but it has to be bipartisan," McCain said.

Obama's speech spelled out where he stands on key issues on reform. While some of his explanations - notably on costs - were incomplete, he left no doubt he's taking ownership.

A CNN/Opinion Research Corp. snap poll of people showed that after the speech, two-thirds said they supported Obama's health care proposals, compared with 53 percent in a survey days before the president spoke. About one in seven speech-watchers changed their minds on Obama's proposal, but the audience was more Democratic than the U.S. population as a whole.

Republicans said Obama came up short in his Wednesday night speech, even though he showered them with attention. Liberals seemed to take it in stride that Obama, trying to reach out to the GOP, signaled flexibility on the government-sponsored plan they want to create to compete with private insurers.

Under Obama's plan insurance policies could not be canceled if people get sick. Insurers would not be able to deny coverage for pre-existing conditions.

For the millions who lack insurance - or have trouble getting it after being laid off or deciding to start a business - Obama's plan would set up a new marketplace in which consumers could pool together. Government subsidies would be available to make premiums more affordable. But individuals would be required to get coverage, and employers would have to contribute.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said the plan

entails too much government.

"Americans weren't looking for a new sales pitch," McConnell said. "They're looking for a new proposal."

Biden said Obama went as far as he needed to for now to compromise on the public option.

"He laid out the underlying principles as to why there is a need for a public option," the vice president said. "He is willing to sign a bill, any bill, by whatever mechanisms you call it, that in fact guarantees that there is in fact a choice for people that is affordable."

Now, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, D-Mont., is moving forward with plans to debate legislation by the end of the month. Baucus had delayed action for months, with Obama's blessing, hoping to broker a bipartisan deal. But Wednesday, he said he would press ahead with or without Republicans.

In Obama's speech, he said he will listen to all ideas but also added, in a clear reference to Republicans, "I will not waste time with those who have made the calculation that it's better politics to kill this plan than to improve it."

In an unusual outburst from the Republican side of the House chamber, Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., shouted out "You lie" when the president said illegal immigrants would not benefit from his proposals. Wilson later apologized for "this lack of civility."

Biden appeared on ABC's "Good Morning America," CBS's "The Early Show" and NBC's "Today" show. McCain was interviewed on the "Today" show.

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