

July 14, 2009

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN BILL PASCRELL, JR.

Delivered before the House of Representatives

I rise today to express just how important it is that we pass comprehensive health reform this year that expands health insurance coverage, reigns in spending, and is fiscally responsible.

The health reform package that the Committees will consider this week shows a genuine commitment to reversing the current unsustainable trends, to providing stability for hard-working Americans, and to being fiscally responsible, which I can assure you, as a member of the Ways and Means Committee, is not an easy task.

There is no question that we must take action and that our actions must be fully paid for. With these ground rules, we face difficult decisions, many of which are not politically popular, but my colleagues and I on Ways and Means are fully committed to paying for this essential legislation.

Our current path is unsustainable, and I share with you some disturbing figures from my home state of New Jersey that illustrate this point.

New Jerseyans are paying more and getting less. Between 2000 and 2007, the average New Jersey worker's share of family premiums nearly doubled, outpacing the growth in wages nearly five times over. Even with insurance, 12 percent of people in New Jersey report not visiting a doctor due to high costs. As we know, half of all bankruptcies nationally are due to medical debt, and among those, three-fourths have insurance.

The uninsured have a real economic impact on the state of New Jersey. Businesses and families in New Jersey shoulder a hidden tax of nearly \$1,000 per year on premiums to subsidize the costs of the uninsured. Since 1992, 24 hospitals in New Jersey have shut their doors at least in part because of the strains of uncompensated care.

There's a real lack of competition in the health insurance market in New Jersey. My state's largest insurer controls 43 percent of the state commercial market.

Thank you, Speaker.