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Dennis Mayeaux: Time for meaningful health care reform is now

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Comprehensive health care reform is a political and social challenge that has escaped this country for more than 30 years. This year, divergent interests are coming together to finally fix our health care system. There are proposals in Congress right now that would provide high quality, affordable health care and give people the choice of keeping their current insurance plan and their family physician, internist or other primary care doctor.



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As a family physician, I see the effects of our broken health care system every day. Let's face it, access to coverage is never guaranteed. It is not easy to treat patients who are uninsured because they can't afford coverage or are unable to get coverage due to age or a pre-existing condition. Every day even insured patients are refused care due to coverage denials. I am tired of seeing my patients struggle paying for the health care they need. Health care reform can't come soon enough.

What does it take to make this happen? We first need legislation that covers everyone, requiring insurance companies to sell plans regardless of family history, or pre-existing conditions, and to guarantee that patients can renew their coverage after they've become sick.

Legislation also needs to ensure that once people have insurance, they also have access to a primary care physician. Unfortunately, there is a growing shortage of primary care doctors to meet that need. The reformed system must value primary care if we want medical students to choose careers such as Family Medicine. We need family physicians to keep people healthy, provide early treatment for the most common health problems, and coordinate comprehensive and seamless care when subspecialty attention is needed.

There is some good news. We have a vehicle that can begin making all these

improvements happen. It's called the Affordable Health Choices Act being debated in the U.S. Senate. The House of Representatives is considering a similar bill, which also includes a focus on primary care. It is called the America's Affordable Health Choices Act. These proposals promise to ensure affordable health coverage for nearly everyone.

It's time to stop playing politics and solve the health care crisis. We must find a uniquely American solution that controls skyrocketing health care costs and gives our patients peace of mind when it comes to their health care. Our Surgeon General nominee, Family Physician Regina Benjamin, hopes to be "America's Family Physician." Having a Family Physician is vital to every Floridian's health. Let us support that goal by providing access to all.

Meaningful and sustainable health care reform is possible if Congress passes legislation that gives everyone in the United States access to a patient-centered medical home, where their doctor will ensure they get the care they need, when they need it and where they need it.

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