

Remarks

**AMA Press Conference
National Press Club
Washington, DC
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**Nancy H. Nielsen, MD
President-elect
American Medical Association**

Good morning and welcome.

I'm Dr. Nancy Nielsen, an internist from Buffalo, New York, and president-elect of the American Medical Association.

Today, the AMA launches a three-year national campaign to cover the uninsured. We're doing this on behalf of the patients of America and the physicians who care for them. We call it the Voice for the Uninsured.

We want to give voice to the 45 million Americans without health insurance – because it has become too heavy a burden on too many hard-working people.

We know that millions of them delay care because they have no coverage. And as a result, they live sicker – and die younger.

In the past, the perception has been that the uninsured live in the shadows – the homeless, the downtrodden, the chronically unemployed.

That's no longer true, if it ever was. Today, many Americans need look no further than their own families or working neighbors to find someone without health insurance. Eighty percent of the uninsured are in families that earn a paycheck.

In fact, 1 in 7 Americans now find themselves uninsured. That's not just a statistic, it's a tragedy.

One in 7 is 45 million Americans too many – and through our Voice for the Uninsured campaign, the AMA wants to make sure the uninsured are a priority in next year's election.

By spotlighting this issue and putting a face on this very human condition – we seek to spur meaningful action toward a solution.

You may know one of the one in seven Americans without health coverage. You may be one of them. Once, I was one of them.

It makes this a deeply personal issue for me.

When I attended graduate school right here in Washington, D.C., I was uninsured for two pregnancies.

Those two children were delivered through public health clinics. Without coverage, that was my only option.

When my 14-month-old daughter had a fever of nearly 106 degrees, I had to take her to Children's Hospital's emergency department. For the rest of the month, I had no money for food for my kids.

If this can happen to me, it can happen to anyone.

That's why I'm here today, calling for action.

The AMA and its quarter-million members have long been involved in developing practical solutions to the nation's health care crises.

Earlier this year, the AMA joined forces with a group of 16 national health care stakeholders to reach consensus on recommendations to cover the uninsured using some of the core principles of the AMA proposal.

So covering the uninsured is a top priority for the AMA, and today we're taking a big step forward in our commitment to cover all Americans.

As the 2008 presidential hopefuls develop their platforms for health care reform, the American Medical Association is presenting them with our proposal – which offers a practical, effective course of action.

Under the AMA plan, the vast majority of Americans would have the means to purchase health insurance through tax credits. It would give individuals choices, so they can select the appropriate coverage for themselves and their families. And it would promote needed market reforms in the insurance industry.

Taken together, it's a sensible, practical approach that builds on the strengths of the current system.

This campaign will rally physicians, mobilize patients, and amplify the voices of voters on the crisis of the uninsured.

These voters deserve to hear the candidates make a definite commitment to reduce the number of uninsured Americans.

We want to make sure the personal stories of the uninsured – are heard by the politicians and the pundits.

The AMA is in a unique position to ensure the candidates do just that – to keep our patients first and foremost in their proposals.

Every day in millions of ways – America's doctors touch the lives of all Americans.

Those with health insurance and those without.

We not only know their health histories, their symptoms and the care we've prescribed –

We know them as individual men, women and children.

For the doctors of America, our ethic of caring and concern for our patients goes well beyond our encounters with them in the office or the hospital.

We want to make sure our public officials understand that concern – our call to ease the burden – and our plan to do just that.

While one in 7 Americans may not have health insurance – they do have a vote.

And we can help make their voices heard.

So – today – we begin a three-year, multi-million dollar campaign – focused this year on Washington, DC, and the early presidential primary states. We'll go national with this campaign in 2008.

Our ultimate goal is to enact legislation to cover the uninsured in 2009.

We want to make sure that when voters go into the booths in November next year, they will do so knowing they are voting for a candidate committed to helping America's uninsured.

The AMA is reaching out to voters in early primary states and the nation's capital –

To highlight this problem and offer a solution. To reach out to candidates and lawmakers, and encourage them to take a serious look at our proposal to cover the uninsured.

I want to show you a few examples of the advertising effort you'll be seeing in the early primary states – and here in Washington. These ads feature real doctors and real uninsured patients.

[DISPLAY ADS]

The AMA's print and broadcast ads will appear in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and the District of Columbia.

We'll have stationary and mobile billboards in the key primary states.

We'll be seen in transit stations and bus shelters in New Hampshire and here in D.C. – most visibly at Metro Center, where we'll have scores of posters displaying the AMA's ads.

We'll even distribute prescription bags to pharmacies stamped with the AMA's Voice for the Uninsured message – for use in those same cities and states.

We'll also be on the air with this campaign. If you'll direct your attention to the screen, we have a preview of our television ad for you ...

[ROLL TELEVISION AD]

In conjunction with this effort, we've launched a dedicated website – www.VoiceForTheUninsured.org that includes a petition that patients and physicians can sign to support the AMA's plan for coverage for all.

And, at the same time – the AMA is reaching out to doctors to involve them in the campaign.

We're enlisting them – along with medical students – to become personal advocates in the public arena;

We're asking them to give our materials to their patients – and report on their personal experiences.

In short – it's a full-court press – advertising blitz to get voters talking – and candidates acting.

And now – I want to introduce a colleague of mine on the AMA's Board of Trustees –

A pediatrician who treats patients every day –

Children in need – whose health and well-being are far more important than a dollars-and-cents transaction.

Dr. Samantha Rosman can testify to that.

She sees kids in need every day at Boston Medical Center.

I'll let her tell you the rest – Dr. Rosman.

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