

As a young college student tracking towards a career in medicine, I have an obvious interest in the health care system. I listened intently when President Obama declared that reforming health care would be a bipartisan effort. I listened closely when Sarah Palin insisted that establishing death panels would not help this country. Through it all, I grimaced at the ugly process that went into passing the health care reform bill. In spite of the bitter process, passing health care was the right thing to do.

Just a few weeks before the passage of the bill I spoke with a young, pregnant, minority college student. She had been dealing with significant tooth pain for two years, but could not afford to get the pain checked out. She informed me that never in her life had she been able to go to the doctor for a routine physical or to have a symptom examined. She said that she hoped health care passes, so that she could finally get her first physical and go visit the oral surgeon she so desperately needed to see. For her, and for the 30 million Americans just like her, passing this bill was not a political issue. It was one of the most significant moments in their lives.

This bill did not just benefit the uninsured. It benefited every sick American who was denied acceptance for insurance coverage. It benefited every American who had insurance but suddenly reached their lifetime coverage cap. It benefited every American living on a modest income struggling each month to pay rising insurance premiums. In addition, this bill laid the groundwork for a healthier and better educated nation by requiring that chain restaurants display nutritional information on menus, menu boards, and drive-throughs. Even more importantly, the bill gave insurance companies an incentive to promote true health since they can no longer deny treatment to the sick.

Insurance companies have decried this bill for its high cost. They wonder how they will be able to provide coverage for every American and still maintain a viable business model. Yet, insurance companies conveniently forget to mention the new revenue streams the bill will create by requiring every American to purchase insurance. They don't mention the jobs this bill will create by forcing the companies to hire additional workers to effectively take care of the millions of new insurance buyers. Now, it is true that this bill may limit the profitability of insurance companies, currently one of the most profitable industries in the country. It is also true that the reduced profits may cause insurance companies to lower payments to doctors, but this is a small price to pay for a healthier, better educated, and more fully insured nation.

There may have been smarter ways to reform health care. Perhaps merely expanding access to Medicare and Medicaid without further regulating the private insurance industry would have been the best approach. Perhaps creating a public option would have been the best approach. Perhaps reforming insurance piece by piece would have been the best approach. The bill may even create new problems while solving existing ones. Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue that health care reform was not essential for our country. It is difficult to believe that having sick citizens unable to receive access to medical treatment is an acceptable status quo for the richest country in the world. For all these reasons, I am proud that we passed this bill. We must now come together as a united country to make it work.