

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), chair of the House Committee on Rules, opened the historic debate on the urgent need for health care reform as she brought the stories from her constituents to the House floor.

“This bill is the right thing to do and the time to act is now,” she said. “Our bill covers an estimated 32 million Americans in a fiscally responsible way that improves Medicare benefits, holds insurance companies accountable and helps small business owners with coverage. We are finally gaining ground against insurance special interests.”

Slaughter brought with her and displayed on the House floor a letter President Roosevelt sent to Congress on January 23, 1939 asking them to making national health insurance part of his social security plan. The National Archives provided the copy that contains his notes in the margins.

Slaughter said the letter from Roosevelt, who was Governor of New York State from 1929-1932, is “a reminder that the eyes of history are watching us and that future generations will look at what we do today as a guidepost to who we are as a people.”

She spoke of a constituent in Buffalo who has to drive his epileptic son to New York City for the care he needs. His insurance company limits the doctors he can see and his son’s preexisting condition prevents him from switching insurance companies. His words to Congresswoman Slaughter: “we are slowly going poor.”

Slaughter said today’s historic legislation will transform the way we deliver health care in this country.

Slaughter spoke on the rule providing for the consideration of the Senate Amendments to H.R. 3590, the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act”, and H.R. 4872, the “Reconciliation Act of 2010”.

[Click here to view a copy of the letter sent from President Roosevelt to Congress in 1939.](#)

Congresswoman Slaughter's Remarks on Today's Historic Health Care Vote

Mr. Speaker these have been solemn days here and not just because of the important legislation before us.

Yesterday just steps away from where we are now standing a group of protestors engaged in dangerous and derogatory behavior toward four of our members.

I believe the attacks yesterday were a step back for this country, a stark reminder of where we used to be and of how much further we must travel to fulfill the promise of equality.

It was only two weeks ago that my colleague John Lewis marked the 45th anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama. And yet this civil rights icon was accosted yesterday while walking over here to cast a vote.

The use of racist, homo-phobic and inflammatory rhetoric, and the reports that the protestors who were gathered on our east terrace plaza attempted to spit on a member of Congress, are heartbreaking.

This type of display should alarm every American and encourage us to work harder to put aside hateful divisions and come together to bridge the volatile spirit that is tearing apart our country.

The anger isn't just contained outside the Capitol. Last week someone hurled a brick through the window of my district office in the dark of night. It's time to step back and remind ourselves why we are here.

I'd like to show an incredible document given to me this week by the National Archives from the collection of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's original records.

As the father of the Social Security plan, Roosevelt has an honored place in the battle to create a national insurance plan for our country.

His message, dated January 23, 1939 and entitled "To the Congress of the United States," talks plainly about the need of this government to provide health care for its citizens.

"It was recognized at the time that a comprehensive health program was required as an essential link in our national defenses against individual and social insecurity," Roosevelt wrote.

"The health of the people is a public concern; ill health is a major cause of major suffering, economic loss and dependency; good health is essential to the security and progress of the nation."

Reading this historic note, with pencil scrawls along the top, takes my breath away. It's a reminder that the eyes of history are watching us and that future generations will look at what we do today as a guidepost to who we are as a people.

The effort to reform the health care system in this country dates back at least to Theodore Roosevelt, who campaigned in 1912 by promising: "We pledge ourselves to work unceasingly in State and Nation for ... the protection of home life against the hazards of sickness."

Still later President Harry Truman tackled reforms, as did President Clinton during the 1990's, a battle that I was here for. And before that, the last broad legislative rewrite was led by President Richard Nixon.

It's remarkable to me that even after all these years, our final bill may end up being less progressive than the plan that Nixon would have supported!

Yet still the forces on the other side are whipping up opposition.

I want to share a story we heard from one of my constituents in Buffalo. He said that his son has begun to have serious seizures but that his insurance only covers emergency room visits.

The only specialist who would see his son is in New York City. After a few visits, his son was diagnosed with epilepsy – a preexisting condition - so he can't get new insurance. So he is stuck driving back and forth from Buffalo to New York so his son can see this specialist.

His words to me: "We are slowly going poor."

Our bill covers an estimated 32 million Americans in a fiscally responsible way that improves Medicare benefits, holds insurance companies accountable and helps small business owners with coverage.

We are finally gaining ground against insurance special interests.

Small businesses – the backbone of our economy – will get tax credits if they make health care coverage available for their workers. We offer free preventive care for people on Medicare. We help people who retire at 55, 10 years before they would become eligible for Medicare. And we ban the lifetime and yearly limit on coverage.

All of these provisions have the potential to transform the way we deliver health care in this country.

Our fight has been a long and contentious and the public has been grievously and purposely lied to.

This week, the Congressional Budget Office – which is non-partisan, objective and unbiased – estimates that our legislation will cut the deficit by \$143 billion over the next 10 years and \$1.2 trillion over the following 10. What do Republicans say? That somehow the country can't afford this legislation. And that they don't like this process?

For 100 years we've worked towards this goal, in the face of some pretty intense obstacles.

Harry Truman once said if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. Well the Rules Committee is the kitchen of this House and I'm proud to be the cook.

And I'm proud to stand up and tell people that this bill is the right thing to do and why the time to act is now. I am delighted to vote yes today.

I reserve the balance of my time.