

Historic Health Care Bill passed in House, now Senate must act

Written by Marc H. Morial , NNPA Columnist
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(NNPA) - After winning this year's American League Eastern Division championship, the New York Yankees faced a gauntlet of 11 more games before they could claim their 27th World Series title. Each playoff victory took the team closer to its final goal, but as Yankee legend, Yogi Berra once said, "It ain't over till it's over." The same can be said about health care reform.

On November 7, the American people won the first round of their health care championship series when the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Affordable Health Care for America Act, which would extend health care coverage to 96% of Americans and guarantee stability, lower costs, and higher quality while strengthening efforts to address racial and ethnic health disparities.

It was an historic achievement, marking the first time that any chamber of Congress has ever passed comprehensive health reform. And it could not have happened without the tenacious leadership of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the strategic genius of Majority Whip, James Clyburn or the principled participation of the Congressional Black Caucus led by its dynamic chairman, Congresswoman Barbara Lee of California. Passage of the House bill was also assisted by an unprecedented Civil Rights Health Care War Room effort.

This is a grassroots campaign to mobilize public support led by the joint efforts of the National Urban League, the NAACP and the Black Leadership Forum. As reported in the Afro Newspapers, "The 'war room' includes phone banks, cross-country rallies and the mobilization of Black radio stations to marshal the votes needed..." for real health care reform with a public option.

These efforts were instrumental in securing the passage of the House bill, but this was just a first round victory. The second round involves passage by the Senate and the opposition promises to be even tougher. President Obama has said that he wants to sign a final bill before the end of this year. But opponents are already gearing up to delay and ultimately defeat a Senate bill. That is why we are keeping the Civil Rights Health Care War Room in operation until we achieve a final victory. I urge you to call the war room hotline at 1-866-783-2462 to speak to your Senator and make your voice heard.

Health care reform is especially critical to our communities. People of color are more likely to suffer and die from chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes and heart disease. At that same time, they are less likely to have health insurance and on average spend more of their income on health care.

As Congresswoman Barbara Lee has said, "Grassroots mobilization helped elect the first African American to the presidency of the United States of America. Grassroots activism will help us pass a health care reform with a strong public option."

We won round one, but we need your help to achieve a final victory. Remember, "It ain't over till it's over."