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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce Press Conference on H.R. 3200, America's Affordable Health Choices Act July 14, 2009

This legislation is landmark legislation, and this is a defining moment for our country. We are about to undertake what has eluded so many Presidents and Congresses for far too long. And that is the objective of getting good quality, affordable health care insurance to every American.

The President was elected with a mandate that he undertake this very ambitious goal. He outlined how he wanted to achieve it by building on the system that we have now, by giving people the option to keep the insurance that they have if they like it, and to allow seniors to stay in Medicare but improve that system.

But for those who have no insurance or for those small businesses that cannot afford insurance, our legislation will allow people to choose an insurance option. And I emphasize the word choice because that choice and competition is one very formidable way to hold down the costs.

We are trying to achieve a number of different objectives. But holding down the costs in health care is certainly, by far, our number one objective. The system is unsustainable. We cannot continue to put more and more money into health care especially when you recognize that this country spends more money on health care than any other Western, industrialized nation.

And yet, we have 46 to 50 million people uninsured and more and more stories of people who have insurance that doesn't work for them when they need that insurance to kick in and pay for their medical bills.

We can't afford it as a country, paying for Medicare and Medicaid. We can't afford it for those who are buying insurance that is going up every year. We can't afford it for the governments at the local level that help pay for health care as well.

So our system is dysfunctional and this legislation, we hope, will bring a system together that

will serve all of the American people and all those who provide care for those people.

The legislation that we are rolling out today is an improvement on the draft that was released a couple of weeks ago. It reflects the input from many of our colleagues.

We have a number of items, from making sure that we protect small businesses to making sure that people have more options, and a number of other changes that you'll be able to look at when you see the draft.

This draft, which is the product of the three Committees, will now be presented to each of our three Committees. And in our Committee on Energy and Commerce we will work through some of the differences we have among the members, both Democrats and Republicans, with the objective that we are going to get a bill.

We cannot allow this issue to be delayed. We cannot put it off again. We cannot, quite frankly, go home for a recess unless the House and the Senate both pass bills to reform and restructure our health care system.

And that is what we are going to be doing in the next three weeks, accomplishing this goal in the House and the Senate, so that we can get together and work out one final piece of legislation for the President to sign.

I'm pleased that we've had such strong leadership from our Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, and our Majority Leader, Steny Hoyer, and our Whip, Jim Clyburn, and others in our Caucus.

And we are moving forward. We are going to accomplish what many people have felt wouldn't come in our lifetime. But we are going to make it happen in the House this next few weeks and in the Congress by the end of this year to the President's desk for his signature.