

SPEECH TO THE
ORGANIZING FOR AMERICA RALLY 8/27/09
New Mexico Senator Dede Feldman

*“The Work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives
and the dreams shall never die.”*

That’s what Ted Kennedy said upon giving up his quest for the presidency decades ago.

But as we gather here tonight, Ted Kennedy’s biggest dream—health care reform—is more than just a dream. It is a reality in the making. We are within sight of Kennedy’s goal—closer than we have ever been in half a century.

It is up to us to take the last lap, to take up Kennedy’s passion for justice, because that’s what health care reform is all about—justice, the fundamental right of every American to have equal access to quality, affordable health care—no matter what his or her economic, geographic or health status.

Do you think we can? YES WE CAN

Yes we CAN break the gridlock, and yes we CAN overcome the fears and misinformation that are being spread in senior citizen centers and town halls.

We can do this because people’s own personal experience with the difficulties in affording and getting health care show them that the status quo is unsustainable. And—with a little help from you, and Organizing for America—their own experiences, as individuals, as small businesses, and health care providers, will ultimately trump the current series of lies that can be exposed, with a little reality check from us.

Because healthcare reform is not about government rationing. It is about stopping insurance company rationing. It’s about the 18,000 deaths a year that result

from lack of coverage. It's about stopping suffering of people with chronic conditions who put off treatment because they can't afford coverage, they lose their job or get their policy rescinded because it costs too much. That kind of rationing goes on every day in New Mexico. And try as we might in the New Mexico legislature, that kind of rationing is UNACCOUNTABLE.

But YES we can make it accountable. The current proposals all call for an END to insurance discrimination against pre-existing conditions, an END to lifetime limits, an END to the rescission of policies for people who get too sick and an END to medical underwriting that bases premiums on gender and health status.

And to really make insurance companies accountable, and bring costs down, we need a strong public option that will give people who have no insurance or want to switch jobs, or policies ... a CHOICE. That choice of a publicly sponsored plan that has been so misconstrued as creeping socialism already exists in many states who have state plans of one kind or another. In New Mexico, we offer the State Coverage Insurance Plan, a public/private that we as a state constructed to address our huge problem of working people without insurance.

But let's be straight with the public, since there are many who have used the public option as a bogey man to scare folks who like their own insurance fine ... a public option is not a single payer system. It is not Medicare for All, as much as some of us might like that. It is an insurance product, one among many that will be offered under an insurance exchange or gateway system that will impose some consistency and sense into the labyrinth of policies which now create unnecessary expense. And it will keep costs down, by competing with existing companies. That used to be called the American way.

And here's another REALITY CHECK, for those who say this reform is too expensive, too costly in these tough economic times. Yes, the current estimate for the Senate bill is \$900 billion over ten years. That sounds tremendous, and it is. It is \$90 billion each year. But what they don't tell you—finally Sen. Bingaman told us the other day at the New Mexico First Town Hall—is that in two years, if we do nothing the cost will be \$320 billion a year. So the cost of doing nothing is almost four times more expensive than health care reform.

That little reality check doesn't even get into the core of President Obama's commitment to reform as the ONLY way that Americans are going to remain competitive and restrain the jump in health care costs which will increase future deficits and eat OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN all for lunch.

But let me ask you something.

Who are these people who have suddenly discovered fiscal conservatism? Where have they been for the past decade as health care costs skyrocketed at 3x wages and caused thousands of bankruptcies across the country? Where have they been as thousands of small businesses in New Mexico and elsewhere dropped coverage for their employees, or reduced benefits, increased premiums & co-pays because they just couldn't afford it?

I'll tell you where they've been they been. Every day, every week, every month, every year, they have been spending billions of dollars on the war in Iraq. Since 2003 \$677 billion of our tax dollars have gone out the door—in spite of Sen. Kennedy's opposition—to finance this ill-fated war. If we had used that money for health care, we'd be three quarters of the way there.

When I became a New Mexico Senator in 1997 I pledged that I would cultivate in myself—and in others—what William Sloan Coffin once called “A Passion for the Possible.” Today I feel that passion more intensely than ever. I hope you feel it too. Because the possible is within our grasp.

So, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives and, with your help, the dream WILL become a reality.

THANK YOU

To get involved, or for more information about healthcare reform, email me at dedefeld@comcast.net.