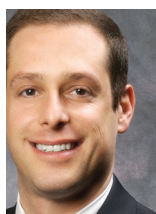


## WE STILL CAN'T WAIT

Nobody thought health reform would be easy. All of us learned in the past several months just how true that was. As I write this column, lawmakers and advocates on both sides of the issue are talking about giving up, starting over or doing something much smaller than previously envisioned.



**JEFF  
TIEMAN**

For CHA and the Catholic health ministry — and indeed for our nation — these options are simply not acceptable. The consequences of failing to move forward are dire and widespread.

A little more than a year ago, President Obama spoke before a joint session of Congress, proclaiming that “health care reform cannot wait, it

must not wait and it will not wait another year.” CHA used that quote to open our “I Can’t Wait” video, which featured photographs of people across the country expressing their hopes for health reform with handwritten signs like “I can’t wait for a system that makes sense,” “I can’t wait to help everyone and anyone who needs it,” and many other heartfelt messages.

In February during the week after his first State of the Union address, President Obama

**The failure to enact legislation is not a small or short-term problem — it is devastating for the millions of people whose health and well-being depend on health reform becoming law.**

participated in a question-and-answer session on YouTube, responding to a group of videos and texts from thousands submitted and voted upon by YouTube users. The first question referred to health care reform, and the questioner included a clip from the “I Can’t Wait” video. Eight months after our video debuted at the 2009 CHA Assembly, the president and hundreds of thousands of people across the country were watching it on YouTube.

I mention this because it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking one voice doesn’t make a

difference, that the forces aligned against reform are too great to take on. The “I Can’t Wait” video — which was developed by our ministry and included a diverse cross-section of patients, caregivers, parents and others — helps prove that our voice does matter, that we can be a force for change and carry a positive, important message that gets heard.

### **POLITICS CHANGE, NEED FOR HEALTH CARE JUSTICE DOES NOT**

It was only a few months ago that President Obama and members of Congress said we were closer than ever to enacting major health care reform legislation. We reached this point because of a shared acknowledgement that our country cannot afford to wait for a better health care system — the moral and economic imperatives for change are too great.

Human dignity is at stake. The health of our economy is at stake. The common good of our communities is at stake. Political posturing and one less Democrat in the Senate do not change the reality on the ground, which is a health care system that fails to meet the needs of millions of our friends and neighbors.

**People can’t wait:** The men, women and children who go without health care — who wish they could afford insurance premiums and neglect their own worsening conditions because they don’t have the money for a doctor visit or other needed care — can’t wait.

**The economy can’t wait:** As inside-the-Beltway players argue and delay, nothing changes about the economic situation that demands a more cost-effective health care delivery and financing system.

**Our future can’t wait:** We still face an urgent need for a stronger, fairer, more affordable and sustainable health care system. This

new system will benefit all of us — insured and uninsured, rich and poor, business owner and unemployed worker.

**Our Vision can't wait:** CHA's *Vision for U.S. Health Care*, which calls for a system that protects life from conception to natural death and pivots reform on expansion of coverage to everyone, can and must still be fulfilled.

It is impossible at the time of this writing to predict the outcome of health care reform efforts. The situation and politics change minute to minute. At CHA and around the Catholic health ministry, we continue to push hard for lawmakers to finish the job. The failure to enact legislation is not a small or short-term problem — it is devastating for the millions of people whose health and well-being depend on health reform becoming law.

We must keep working. We cannot walk away from health care reform because it has become logistically difficult or politically perilous. We cannot give up, we cannot wait.

Whatever reform's status is when this column is published, it will continue to be our responsibility to move forward changes that expand coverage, improve quality, reduce costs and improve long-term sustainability of the system itself.

We face a defining moment in our history. If we move ahead and get this done, future generations will thank us. If we fail, or wait, future generations will pay for it — with their pocketbooks, with their health, with their dignity and even with their lives.

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