

I am delighted to have this opportunity to contribute to *Critical Care Nurse*. I have tremendous respect for nurses -- for the skills, commitment, and compassion you bring to your work. This admiration, inspired in part by my mother-in-law, Virginia Kelley, who was a nurse for many years, has been reinforced again and again by the dedicated nurses I have met all over our country.

Outstanding nursing care is a large part of what makes America's health care system the finest in the world. Too often, however, the failings of the current system undermine your work and everything else that is best about our system. The President will continue to fight for health care reform -- not only because too many Americans cannot get the high quality, affordable health care they need, but because skyrocketing health care costs and mounting burdens on health care professionals are imperiling our nation's economic future. Today, there are nearly 40 million Americans without health insurance -- including close to 10 million children -- and millions more who are grossly underinsured. Despite your commitment, the millions of Americans who are shut out of our current health care system never have the opportunity to receive your help.

I have spent the better part of the last 20 months travelling around this country listening to people's stories. I heard about a child running a high fever who was turned away from two hospital emergency rooms because his family did not have insurance, and who later died of meningitis. The child's cousin, whose family did have insurance, was hospitalized for the same disease and lived. As critical care nurses, you have not only heard these families' stories, but have been there as they happen. I can't imagine how anyone who has listened to

these families or watched their stories unfold can walk away from the issue of health care reform now.

During my travels, I have also learned a great deal from the health care professionals I have met. Many have told me that their hospitals have begun to "economize" by laying off nurses -- putting the high quality of care that their patients now receive at risk. In addition, burdensome administrative requirements force nurses to spend an average of one-third of their time on paperwork. You and your patients deserve better. America's health care system must put patients ahead of paperwork.

As you know, Congress was unable to pass health care reform legislation this session. Well-financed special interests have fought for sixty years to prevent health care reform, and this year they waged an unprecedented battle. The President and I, however, are pleased that we have come further than ever before in the effort to give health security to American families and to preserve the high quality health care that our nation's doctors and nurses deliver today. We are committed to continuing the fight.