



Letters to the Editor
Sunday, November 23, 2008

Health care reform demands more access

With President-elect Barack Obama's nomination of Tom Daschle as secretary of health and human services, our country will have an opportunity once again to seriously consider health care reform.

In "Critical: What We Can Do About the Health Care Crisis," Daschle essentially proposes a plan for universal coverage. It is possible to consider health care reform from this perspective, without compromising our American form of capitalism. But it requires us to move the current debate from one of financing to one that focuses on eliminating health disparities. If we offer a more efficient system of universal coverage and assure some baseline level of care, we can improve the health of Americans and just as significantly, the health of the American economy.

The current economic crisis is exacerbated by trends in wage inequality and the impact of medical costs on businesses and households. In turn, these both have affected the savings rate of Americans.

Caution is advised. Assuring access and universality of health care won't resolve ongoing health disparities. A movement toward sustained health equality requires reeducation of policymakers and the public and a reshaping of the political will.

Because the population's health is dramatically affected by social and structural factors such as poverty, limited education, racial discrimination and the environment, generating public support for societal interventions to reduce health disparities will challenge our new leadership.

Removing access constraints to basic health care for all is a step in the right direction. But we cannot stop there.

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Upper Saddle River, Nov. 21

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