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**President Obama To The NAACP:
Health Care Reform IS A Civil Rights Fight
Between The Lines**

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This week the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (the NAACP) is holding it's 100th Anniversary convention in celebratory "high cotton" (New York) as the nation's oldest civil rights organization of its kind. Longevity has its place. A century of struggle to meet two centuries of strife is nothing to underestimate - if the advocacy is right for the moment. But for the NAACP of the last 25 years, the advocacy hasn't been right for the moment.

The NAACP has spent the last quarter century trying to find relevancy in the post-Civil Rights struggle. With popular culture finally trumping race, racism isn't exactly selling - though we all know it still exists. God blesses the child that has his (her) own these days (even if racism allowed them to get it). Those without aren't exactly trying to hear race based discrimination theories. Classicism is now the order of the day in this 21st Century depression and it takes on all shades of color. Survival in America goes to the fittest - not just the richest. That means it goes to those with the best health care (plans).

President Barack Obama will speak to the NAACP this week, and he can make the old dinosaur a player again. The fact that 47 million people in America are without health care, and another 100 million have jobs with limited health care plans means that there is separate and unequal treatment still going on in America. That's the NAACP's bailiwick. The NAACP needs a relevant fight, and President Obama has one, health care reform. The right to quality, affordable health care is the next big civil rights fight.

Universal health care has long been avoided in the United States. The doctor's lobby (AMA) and the medical provider's lobby (health plans and pharmaceuticals) have always blocked health care reform at every turn. Americans has the shortest life expectancy of any industrialized nation and the state of Americans' health is poor beyond belief. The poorer you are, the more likely you are disproportionately affected

by poor diet, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and various cancers. African Americans are disproportionately affected by poor health. A major cause for this poor health status is lack of access to quality, affordable health care. It's just not there.

Quality health care is tied to wealth, work and wellness, none of which seems to find its way into the black community on a parity basis. But other poor communities, urban and rural, need quality health care for many of the same reasons. Yet, universal health care is seen as a poor, black and immigrant issue that should be disregarded.

The price of a poor life somehow doesn't seem to have the same value as those who can afford to pay for their high priced health insurance. Then, they are trying to scare the public by saying the President's health plan will cost a trillion (with a TR) dollars. It's the same "go slow" tactic that was used to string out segregation (desegregation/integration was too costly - it was cheaper to continue discriminating). If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, what is the cost of doing nothing in the current system?

The NAACP represents communities most adversely affected by lack of access to quality health care. The NAACP knows that in its second 100 years, the fights will not be the same - but the outcomes will be about equity and justice, the same as before. The NAACP should be at the front of the health care reform agenda. The NAACP should be pressing the legislature (Congress), the streets and the courts for fairness and equality in America's health care system.

The NAACP has the capacity to raise the visibility of the issue, and the profile to articulate the unfairness of the present state of health care in America today. The NAACP can press the issue by creating protest lines in every community clinic throughout America, which could extend to hospitals and doctor's offices. Health care in America is more than an issue, it's a movement-and who better at movements than the NAACP. If President Obama needs a lever, the NAACP should be it.


It would make them relevant again - at a time when we most need a new civil rights fight.


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