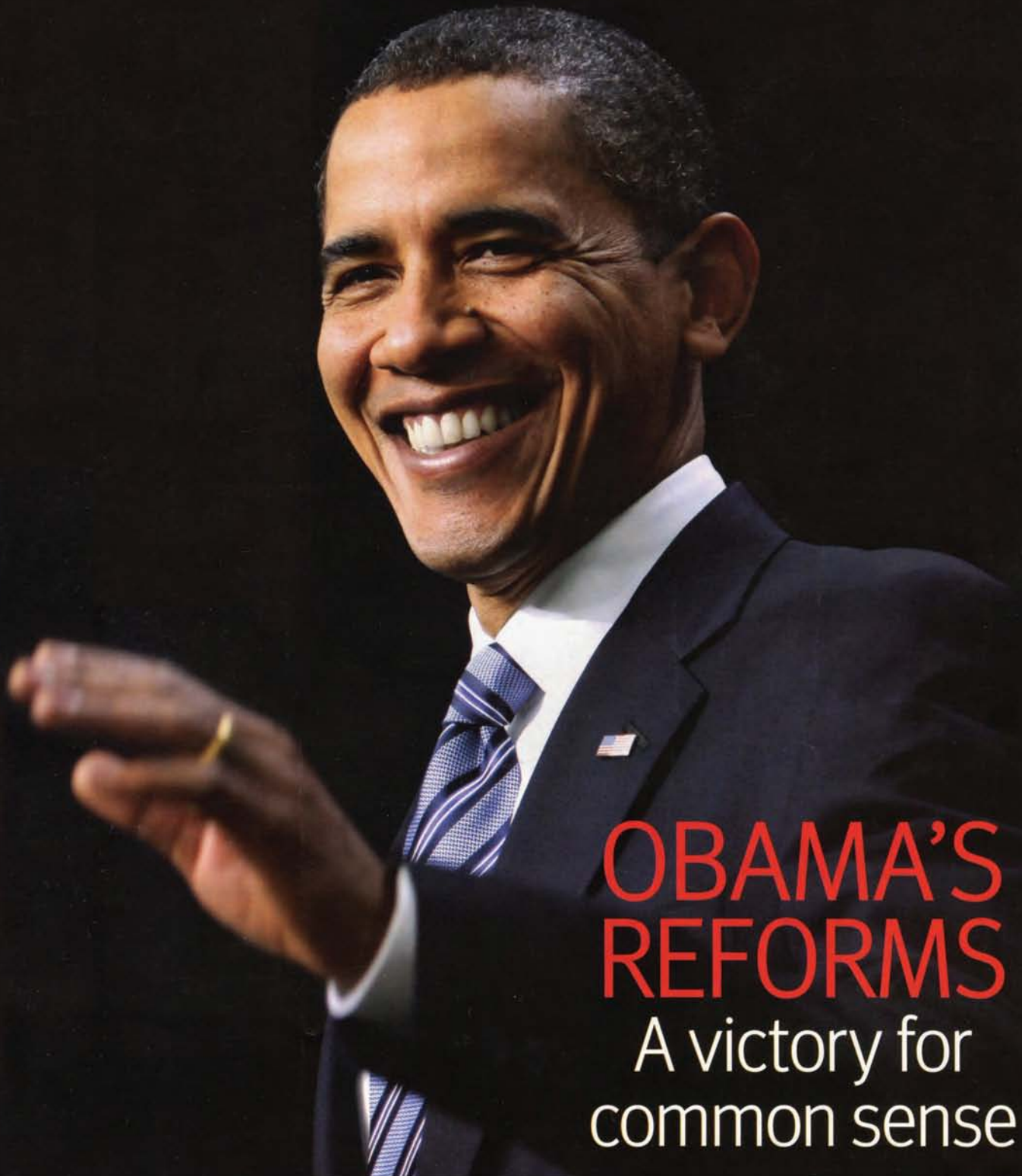


BMJ

340:663-718 No 7748 ISSN 1759-2151
27 March 2010 | bmj.com

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Approval of historic US healthcare reform bill will extend coverage to 32 million more people

Janice Hopkins Tanne NEW YORK

Late on Sunday 21 March the US House of Representatives approved the healthcare reform bill passed by the Senate on Christmas Eve (*BMJ* 2010;339:b5671) and sent it to President Barack Obama to sign into law.

At midnight President Obama praised the legislators and said, "This is what change looks like." He called it a victory for the American people.

The bill's passage followed a year's effort by the president. If it had failed, his Democratic administration would have faced great difficulty in passing other legislation during his three remaining years in office.

The House vote, at 10.45 pm, was 219 to 212, with no Republicans supporting the bill and 34 Democrats voting against it.

Democrats who opposed the bill said that it permitted the federal funding of abortion, because some people would receive subsidies or tax credits to buy insurance covering it. Some were won over by Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the House, and by President Obama, who promised to issue an executive order preventing federal funding of abortion. That gained the support of Bart Stupak, a Michigan Democrat who had led Democrats opposing the bill because they believed it to be weak on abortion funding. Mr Stupak spoke forcefully in favour of the bill.

Healthcare reform is not yet complete. At 11.30 pm the House passed a reconciliation bill, a package of amendments to the Senate bill, which will



President Obama briefed doctors about his final proposals before taking them to the vote

go to the Senate this week. This bill eliminates provisions favouring certain states and increases subsidies to help people afford health insurance.

For a century US presidents have been trying to provide universal health care. The bill passed last night will provide health insurance to 32 million Americans who now lack it.

Health insurance companies will no longer be able to refuse to cover people with pre-existing conditions, to place caps on coverage, or to cancel insurance when they become ill.

All Americans will be required to have health insurance or else pay penalties, and most employers will be required to provide health insurance or pay penalties. However, subsidies and tax credits will help people on low or middle incomes to buy coverage.

The Congressional Budget Office last week estimated that the bill would cost \$940bn (£630bn; €700bn) over 10 years.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1635

See **EDITORIAL**, p 663, **FEATURE**, p 680

US drug manufacturers will have to disclose payments to doctors

Ray Moynihan NSW, AUSTRALIA

New rules forcing drug and device manufacturers to disclose all payments to doctors look set to become law in the United States, after the historic healthcare reform bill was passed by the House of Representatives this weekend.

The "Sunshine Act" was first proposed as standalone legislation three years ago, but its provisions were incorporated into the wider reform bill

now close to being signed into law.

Under the new law all manufacturers of drugs, devices, and biologicals will have to provide details to the government of all payments they make to doctors and teaching hospitals, which will then be made publicly available.

The names of receiving doctors and how much they received will have to be made accessible on a searchable website in a "clear and

understandable" format that can be easily downloaded.

Under the new rules companies will have to disclose consulting fees, honorariums, gifts, entertainment, food, travel, education, research, speaking fees, and grants. Payments of less than \$10 (£7; €7.40) will be exempted, but once a doctor receives more than \$100 in total in any given year from one company, all payments will have to be disclosed.

A previous version of the Sunshine Act would have forced the industry to disclose payments to a much wider group of recipients, including pharmacists, patient advocacy groups, medical schools, and providers of sponsored medical education. However, the language in the final bill means that only payments to doctors and teaching hospitals will have to be disclosed.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1648