

**WASHINGTON**---National Health Law Program executive director Emily Spitzer issued the following statement responding to the President's State of the Union address:

"President Obama addressed the number one issue on everyone's minds: the economy. We support the President's vision of an economy that works for everyone and encourage the President and lawmakers to use this vision as a guide as they tackle major issues of national importance in the coming weeks.

We are less than eight months out from the start of open enrollment in the new marketplaces created under health reform, and more and more states are announcing their decision to expand their Medicaid programs by the day. The potential here is huge-up to 32 million individuals could gain access to affordable health insurance when the law is fully implemented next year. This is a pivotal moment in America's health and a major achievement brought by the hard work of the President, congressional leaders and health advocates around the nation.

While health reform has the possibility to make a major dent in the nation's uninsured, along with needed reforms and investments, the looming fiscal deadlines and continued threats to safety net programs including Medicaid and Medicare threaten to undermine these advances.

We urge President Obama to continue to uphold his commitment to protecting Medicaid and other critical safety net programs from these threats. Any solution that addresses the nation's debt and budget must be balanced and protect the programs that vulnerable communities rely on the most."