



For Immediate Release

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P.O.V.'s "Critical Condition" Reveals Impact of Being Sick and Uninsured In America, Tuesday, Sept. 30, Special Broadcast at 9 p.m. on PBS

Produced in Association with Thirteen/WNET New York

"This film portrays in a visible and powerful way what national surveys have shown repeatedly: for millions of uninsured Americans, care is not available, and they suffer serious consequences as a result." – Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Harvard School of Public Health/Kennedy School of Government

We've seen how recent films like "An Inconvenient Truth" can shape public opinion and advance the policy debate. Roger Weisberg's **Critical Condition** has the potential to play a similar role as the debate over universal health insurance takes center stage during the run-up to the presidential election. Like "An Inconvenient Truth," **Critical Condition** makes it impossible to deny that there is a crisis. Using the same *cinéma vérité* style he employed with **Waging a Living** (P.O.V., 2006), Weisberg allows ordinary hard-working Americans to tell their harrowing stories of battling critical illnesses without health insurance.

The four people profiled in **Critical Condition** live in places as diverse as Los Angeles; Austin, Texas; and Bethlehem, Penn., but they face distressingly similar obstacles to surviving without health insurance. It is through their eyes and words that we are taken through the gaping holes in the health care system, where care is often delayed or denied. Ultimately, the unforgettable subjects of **Critical Condition** discover that being uninsured can cost them their jobs, health, homes, savings, and even their lives.

Critical Condition has its broadcast premiere in a special PBS presentation **Tuesday, Sept. 30, 2008** at 9 p.m. during the 21st season of P.O.V. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films, and is a 2007 recipient of a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking.

Following the broadcast, PBS's McNeil/Lehrer Productions will present a half-hour special exploring the presidential candidates' proposals for health care reform. Susan Dentzer, health correspondent for *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, will moderate the discussion, which will include spokespersons for the candidates as well as distinguished health policy experts.

Critical Condition dramatizes how health care is rationed based on ability to pay. "It's your money or your life," says one of the film's subjects, who courageously lays bare the uncounted cost in pain and suffering that is borne by millions of uninsured Americans

As the film illustrates, the country spends over \$2 trillion a year — over \$6,000 per person — on health care, yet is the only major industrial nation without universal coverage.¹ Forty-seven million Americans live without health insurance, and 80 percent of them are from working families who either cannot afford insurance premiums or lose their insurance exactly when they need it most: when they fall ill and can no longer work.²

Despite spending 50 percent more on health care than any other country in the world,³ America ranks 15th in preventable death,⁴ 24th in life expectancy,⁵ and 28th in infant mortality.⁶ The struggles of the four families profiled in **Critical Condition** put a human face on just what these statistics really mean for ordinary Americans.

The film's subjects:

Joe Stornaiuolo, a doorman for 15 years, loses his finger, then his job, and ultimately his health insurance. Unable to afford the medication or doctor visits he needs to manage his chronic liver disease, Joe has to be hospitalized four times in one year, running up bills in excess of \$60,000. When he finally qualifies for Social Security Disability, he discovers a terrible Catch-22: his income is too great to qualify for Medicaid, and there's a standard two-year waiting period to qualify for Medicare. Despite the unflinching support and care of his wife, Dale, Joe's condition deteriorates, and he passes away just before Christmas. With a grandchild she now must raise alone and medical bills she can never hope to repay, Dale attributes Joe's premature death to his lack of medical coverage.

Karen Dove loses her insurance because her deteriorating health forces her to quit her job as an apartment manager. When she begins experiencing severe recurrent abdominal pains, the doctors she contacts refuse to treat uninsured patients. A year later, after she finally finds a gynecologic oncologist willing to treat her, she is diagnosed with Stage 3 ovarian cancer, which is almost always fatal. Karen undergoes surgery and chemotherapy, which drives her cancer into remission but sinks her family deep into debt. She and her husband are forced to sell their belongings and move into a less expensive home, and Karen must forego necessary treatment and medication. A year after her operation, her cancer appears to have recurred, and like half a million other Americans, she faces a tough battle against cancer without insurance. Karen passed away in March 2008, after production was completed on **Critical Condition**.

Hector Cardenas, a warehouse manager in Los Angeles with diabetes, opted to amputate his infected foot before losing his job and medical benefits. When his insurance coverage lapses, he struggles to repair his broken temporary prosthesis on his own. He cannot walk properly or earn money without a permanent prosthesis, but he cannot afford the permanent prosthesis without a job that offers basic medical benefits. Adding insult to injury, Hector's old insurance company retroactively denies reimbursement for his original prosthesis, and saddles Hector with a \$9,000 bill. He falls five months behind on rent and is forced to move into a single room in a nearby motel. After a year without finding a job, Hector's perseverance pays off and he is hired as a warehouse manager at a new company. He hopes that he can stay healthy enough to survive the probation period until he qualifies for insurance, but he still worries that the company's policy will not cover his pre-existing conditions.

Carlos Benitez, an uninsured chef at a French restaurant, has a severe back deformity that has caused him 15 years of unbearable pain and taken seven inches off his height. After learning that the county hospital will not perform surgery, he becomes convinced that the only way to find an affordable cure is to travel to Mexico, where orthopedic specialists recommend he have surgery as soon as possible. Even though the cost in Mexico City is a fraction of what it would be in Los Angeles, he still can't afford the procedure or the time away from work.

Carlos resigns himself to a life of chronic pain and deformity until he experiences what he calls a miracle. Dr. Patrick Dowling, the Chief of the Department of Family Medicine at UCLA, had seen Carlos at a local health fair where the doctor was supervising his medical students as they offered free check-ups to the public. Making a rare exception to the rule, Dr. Dowling is able to arrange for a private orthopedic hospital and a team of surgeons to waive their \$300,000 fees for Carlos' operation. Dr. Dowling is "very pleased that we could help this one individual out," but laments that "we can't do endless surgery on uninsured patients; it begs a national solution."

“Many of my previous documentaries have taken viewers inside the nation’s embattled health care system,” says director Weisberg. “In making **Critical Condition**, I wanted to build on my previous work in order to contribute to this historically significant moment when the nation considers how to extend health insurance coverage to all Americans. During just the 90-minute running time of this film, an additional 377 Americans will lose medical coverage. I hope **Critical Condition** will be a call to action as the health care reform debate heats up in 2008.”

Critical Condition is a production of Public Policy Productions, Inc., in association with Thirteen/WNET New York and American Documentary | P.O.V.

Funding for **Critical Condition** is provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Charles A. Frueauff Foundation, Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, New York Community Trust, Park Foundation, Public Welfare Foundation, Public Broadcasting Service, Silverweed Foundation, Spunk Fund, and the Trull Foundation.

About the filmmaker:

Roger Weisberg **Director/Producer**

Veteran documentary filmmaker Weisberg’s 25 previous films have earned over 100 awards, including Emmy, duPont-Columbia and Peabody awards, as well as two Academy Award nominations (in 2001 for **Sound and Fury** and in 2003 for **Why Can’t We Be a Family Again?**). He has made the American health care system a special focus of his work with such films as **What’s Ailing Medicine, Our Children at Risk, Borderline Medicine, Who Lives-Who Dies, and Can’t Afford to Grow Old.**

Credits:

Director/producer:	Roger Weisberg
Co-directors/-producers:	Jilann Spitzmiller (California), Heather Courtney (Texas)
Editors:	Sandra Christie, Christopher White
Composer:	Richard Fiocca

Running Time: 86:46

Festivals:

- Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, New York, June 2008
- Independents Night, New York, June 2008
- New Jersey International Film Festival, Rutgers University, June 2008
- Trenton Film Festival, Trenton, N.J., May 2008
- Arizona International Film Festival, Tucson, April 2008
- Cinequest Film Festival, San Jose, Calif., March 2008
- Tiburon International Film Festival, Tiburon, Calif., March 2008

Co-Producers:



Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, *Exposé*, *Bill Moyers Journal*, and *Cyberchase* — as well as the work of Bill Moyers — to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *New York Voices*, *Reel 13* and *Sunday Arts*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects – including the Teaching and Learning Celebration – as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: www.thirteen.org.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 21st season on PBS in 2008, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing

Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, P.O.V. has launched the *P.O.V. Blog*, a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news, and link to further resources. The P.O.V. Web site, blog, and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

American Documentary | P.O.V. works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, P.O.V. offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training in order to use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, The Fledgling Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The September 11th Fund and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and Thirteen/WNET New York

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

¹ Source: National Health Expenditures Aggregate, Per Capita Amounts, Percent Distribution, and Average Annual Percent Growth, by Source of Funds: Selected Calendar Years 1960-2005.² Table. National Health Expenditure Data. 18 Jan. 2007. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Office of the Actuary, National Health Statistics Group; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, and U.S. Bureau of Census. 9 Oct. 2007 <www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalHealthExpendData/downloads/tables.pdf>.

² Source: "The Uninsured: A Primer – Key Facts About Americans Without Health Insurance." Jan. 2006. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. 21 Sept. 2007 <<http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/7451.pdf>>.

³ Source: Annex Table 2 Selected National Health Accounts indicators: measured levels of per capita expenditure on health, 2000-2004." Chart. 22 Feb. 2007. WHO. 22 Oct. 2007 <www.who.int/entity/nha/country/Annex%202.pdf>.

⁴ Source: How, Sabrina K.H., and Cathy Schoen. "Mortality Amenable to Health Care." Table. National Scorecard on U.S. Health System Performance: Complete Chartpack. Sept. 2006. The Commonwealth Fund. 10 Oct. 2007 <www.cmwf.org/usr_doc/Schoen_natscorecard_chartpack_955.pdf>.

⁵ Source: "Health Status (Mortality)." OECD Health Data 2007. Table. 1 Jan. 2007. OECD Health Division. 10 Oct. 2007 <http://www.oecd.org/document/16/0,2340,en_2649_37407_2085200_1_1_1_37407,00.html>.

⁶ Source: "Health Status (Mortality)." OECD Health Data 2007. Table. 1 Jan. 2007. OECD Health Division. 10 Oct. 2007 <http://www.oecd.org/document/16/0,2340,en_2649_37407_2085200_1_1_1_37407,00.html>.