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Local leaders react to Obama speech

“He wasn't speaking to Congress, he was speaking to the American people, clarifying things they had heard. And he said basically that people should join in or get out of the way. He reassured people that he wasn't threatening those who already have good healthcare, and he reassured seniors he doesn't intend to change their plan.”

-- Donna Shalala, president of the University of Miami and former secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the Clinton administration

“I'm thrilled that he commented on tort reform. That's a good start to get together with Republicans on a good reform bill. I think that could save a significant amount of money to pay for his other reforms. I hope it's not just something he's saying to get Republicans to the table.”

-- Dr. Alberto Casaretto, president-elect, Broward County Medical Association

“It discourages me in that if the money [to pay for healthcare for undocumented immigrants] doesn't come from there, where else will it come from? We're in a bind. Without the funding, we will have to take it from our operations budget. We can't just throw these patients away.”

-- Dr. Eneida Roldan, CEO of Jackson Health System, which spent \$38 million in 2008 on healthcare for undocumented immigrants.

“Medicare and Medicaid require increased government support. The problem is that the number of people who are eligible is increasing while the number of people paying into it is shrinking. But this is a very bureaucratic system. To the extent that government can take a fresh look at its regulations -- but not its quality of care -- a lot of the costs can be cut.”

-- Jeff Freimark, CEO, Miami Jewish Home & Hospital, which funds 70 percent of its beds through Medicare and Medicaid, on Obama's claim that \$500 billion can be cut from Medicare by targeting waste, fraud and inefficiencies.

“Until now, the administration had used a very broad brush in terms of what it wants. This gave us a little more direction. Whether people agree in both houses of Congress is another question. I now think something will be passed. What it will be, with so many versions out there, is anybody's guess.”

-- Steven G. Ullmann, professor and director of Health Sector Management and Policy, University of Miami

Compiled by Miami Herald staff writer Fred Tasker