



## P.O.V.'s "CRITICAL CONDITION"

By Roger Weisberg

Special Broadcast Tuesday, Sept. 30, 2008 at 9 p.m. on PBS (Check local listings)

### Filmmaker's Statement

**Critical Condition** takes viewers inside the lives of a diverse group of uninsured Americans as they battle critical illness over a two-year period. I chose a cinéma vérité style because I wanted viewers to vicariously experience the medical, financial, and emotional impact of being unable to obtain necessary health care. Instead of interviewing experts or policy makers who would tell viewers what to think, I wanted these disturbing stories to unfold through the experiences and words of our primary subjects. I believe that these narratives of uninsured patients in the midst of their own medical crises will engage viewers far more effectively than yet another recitation of grim facts and statistics.

No matter how staggering it is to learn that 18,000 Americans die every year simply because they lack health insurance, that number is still only an abstract statistic. However, a single uninsured individual who dies prematurely after you've grown attached to him is a tragedy. Viewers cannot help feeling a sense of outrage while watching a loving husband and father lose his life because he cannot afford the medication or doctor visits he needs to manage his chronic disease.

There are three ways I hope to get ordinary Americans, even those who are satisfied with their own medical coverage, to care about this issue. First, by bringing the stories of extremely sympathetic individuals to the screen, viewers will be forced to empathize with our subjects and realize that an illness or job loss could land them in a similar predicament. Second, by presenting access to health care as a moral issue, we can bridge the conventional partisan political divide, making viewers feel a collective sense of responsibility for their fellow Americans. Lastly, for viewers who need a hard-nosed cost-benefit rationale for universal health insurance, our stories vividly illustrate the enormous cost in dollars and human suffering that we pay when the public ultimately foots the bill for catastrophic illnesses that could be inexpensively prevented with access to routine primary care.

Many of my previous documentaries have taken viewers inside the health care system, including *Sound and Fury*, *What's Ailing Medicine*, *Our Children at Risk*, *Borderline Medicine*, *Who Lives - Who Dies*, *Can't Afford to Grow Old*, and *Health Care on the Critical List*. In making **Critical Condition**, my principal goal was to build on my previous body of work in order to contribute to this historically significant moment when the nation will consider how to extend health insurance coverage to all Americans.

During just the 90-minute running time of **Critical Condition**, an additional 377 Americans will lose health coverage. As ever-increasing numbers of Americans become uninsured, this crisis will undoubtedly become the most hotly debated domestic policy issue in the 2008 presidential election, and that's precisely when this film will be released. We've seen how recent films like *An Inconvenient Truth* can become an effective call to action. I hope **Critical Condition** can play a similar role as the health care reform debate heats up in 2008.