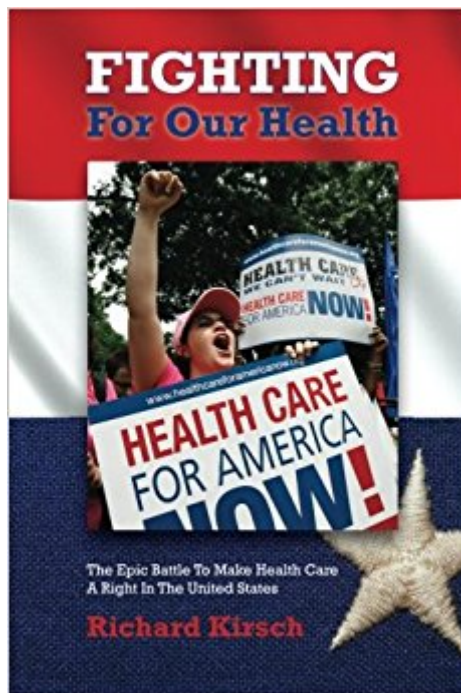


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# Fighting For Our Health: The Epic Battle To Make Health Care A Right In The United States (Rockefeller Institute Press)



## Synopsis

Insider Richard Kirsch offers a vivid, first-person account of how health care reform came to be. This first-person account brings readers inside the biggest and most consequential issue campaign in American history. *Fighting for Our Health* recounts how a reform campaign led by grassroots organizers played a crucial role in President Obama's signing historic health reform legislation in March of 2010—defeating the tea partiers, Republican Party, health insurance industry, and the US Chamber of Commerce. The action takes place inside the Beltway—the White House, Congressional anterooms, and the streets of DC—and at hundreds of town meetings, demonstrations, and confrontations in places like Danville, Virginia and Lincoln, Nebraska. The book describes the tense relationship between progressives and the Obama administration, as the President and his team both pushed for reform and made repeated concessions to the health care industry, while trying to squelch any pressure from the left. Most powerfully, it is the story of the triumph of thousands of people who had seen loved ones die, families go bankrupt, small businesses ruined, and futures destroyed by the health insurance system in the United States. The book is accessible to undergraduate and graduate students as well as the general reader. Detailed enough to interest people primarily concerned about health care policy and politics, it will also capture readers generally interested in US political dynamics and the health of American democracy. "Richard Kirsch's book is the rarest of combinations: an insider look at American politics that instructs as well as entertains. As head of the remarkable advocacy organization Health Care for America Now, Kirsch was on the frontlines of the fight for affordable, quality coverage for all Americans in 2008–10. Now he recalls those searing yet inspiring experiences with wit, wisdom, and a wry sense of humor. The result is a compelling story of the power of citizens' groups that says much about how health care reform happened—and what its passage and uncertain implementation mean for our democratic future." — Jacob S. Hacker, Professor of Political Science at Yale University and coauthor of *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*

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## Customer Reviews

This is an exciting, indispensable account of the passage of the Affordable Care Act from the field. In my view it is far, far more valuable to students and to scholars than accounts from inside the Beltway. Richard Kirsch sees the passage from a dual perspective, from how the proposed plan is received and responded to by people who fought for universal coverage across the nation, at the grass roots, and also how others who worked with Health Care for America Now (HCAN) in Washington viewed the Obama legislation. As I see it, Obama care is the opening act of what will come, if we are lucky: a truly landmark piece of social legislation, and this time we have an account of how we got the votes for passage due to the hard fight that Kirsch and HCAN made on our behalf. I worked with Richard Kirsch when we both labored, briefly, in New York State's flirtation with universal health care in the early 1990s. It is thrilling to see how he and HCAN played a central leadership role in this crucial step toward a better future for all of us, and a more just health care system.

I must admit I was skeptical when I heard of the Jamaica Plain, MA, forum was hosting someone (whose name I had never heard) on the Affordable Care Act (ACA). I have been so involved in the Public Health end of the so called "health care" system (which is really only a medicare system) that I almost did not go. I have heard so many simply awful and uninformed things about the ACA that I planned my first question to basically be: "Who are you and why do you think you know anything about this issue at all?" I focus my work on the community health issues and have stayed away from the access to care issue which has dominated the discussion for many many years! Thank the gods I remained silent and simply listened. I am even more pleased I went because I am reading this (his) book. It is an easy read and documents so much that I did not know about the process. Mr. Kirsch is

amazing; he has used to his advantage all his learned and hard earned experience in community organizing to be a primary driving force in not only the ACA but in helping to elect one of the greatest presidents (IMHO) of our time! Mr Kirsch is modest and self effacing and seems to have stayed in the background for so much but he is a powerhouse! His book is readable, fun and totally engaging!

I, too, was deeply involved in this fight for health care to become a right for all Americans. HCAN was the primary driver of all my activities. Yet, I had no idea how complex, large and powerful this group was! I learned far more about what took place behind the curtains by reading this book than by taking place in the dozens of events I was recruited to participate in. I traveled to DC a half dozen times, lobbied on the Hill, wrote Op-Ed pieces, called in dozens of times, etc... and yet I never really knew the back story behind what it took to build the organization that brought me to the dance. In full disclosure, I'm featured in the book (Chapter 8). That only legitimizes my feedback. I had no idea! I always wondered how it was that Speaker Pelosi asked me to address the Nation from the steps of the Capital, representing the small business owner constituency, when she unveiled the House bill. I had known I was involved with a well organized group but I had no idea! I loved reading this for two reasons: it took me back in time to relive the fight month by month - the memories were vivid. Plus, it educated me as to the extent of the historic victory we achieved and what it took to accomplish that mission. Thank you Richard Hirsch for writing this book and the great work you have accomplished. Dan Sherry

this book is insightful, easy to read, and explains the often impenetrable world of the goings on in Washington in a way that everyone can understand it...

What a joy and relief to read a book about this country's latest chapter in the struggle for universal health care that is written by, and with the point of view of, a long time activist political organizer. Like Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States", this book, too, has a different feel as it showcases the role of vital labor and citizens' groups to promote progressive reforms. Most stories of new important legislation focus exclusively on the actions of the President's office, the Congress, and the highly financed lobbyists. Not this one. In Kirsch's account, we learn about how the national coalition of labor and community groups came together, developed common principles, raised the necessary funding, and coordinated with local groups all over the country. The result was the well coordinated campaign so necessary to maintain the pressure on all the more public political

figures. The campaign to make health care a right for all of the country's people required courage, commitment, brains, and money from the tens of thousands of people involved. Kirsch's "Fighting for Our Health" documents these efforts. It is an exciting and fun read. It is an important history and ultimately provocative guide to waging a national campaign of highly coordinated local grass roots actions in the pursuit of progressive change.

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