

US House backs healthcare reforms



Mr Obama personally urged the Democrats to back the bill

The US House of Representatives has backed a healthcare bill in a step towards reforms promised by President Obama, despite strong opposition.

Passed in a narrow 220-215 vote, the bill aims to extend coverage to 36 million more Americans and provide affordable healthcare to 96%.

The bill now has to be reconciled with a separate Senate draft law.

President Obama has made reform of America's healthcare system a central plank of his domestic agenda.

Correspondents say the legislation could lead to the biggest changes in American health care in decades.

Before Saturday's vote, Mr Obama made a rare visit to Congress to try to persuade wavering members of his own Democratic Party to back the bill.

HEALTHCARE IN THE US

47 million uninsured, 25 million under-insured

Healthcare costs represent 16% of GDP, almost twice OECD average

[Q&A: US healthcare reform](#)

[Healthcare reforms: Your views](#)

He said such opportunities came around "maybe once in a generation".

The bill would allow the government to sell insurance in competition with private companies and make insurers offer cover to those with pre-existing conditions.

But this so-called "public option" had been scaled back in the wrangling that preceded the House vote.

A Senate debate on the bill is expected in the coming days.