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[Health economist bemoans 'rising tide of administrators'](#)

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Health care shouldn't be treated as a commodity like shoes or oil.

By KATHY ANEY

East Oregonian

Health care shouldn't be treated as a commodity like shoes or oil.

That's the opinion of economist Gerald Friedman, who told an audience last week at Blue Mountain Community College that administrative bloat and ballooning drug costs are overwhelming the American health care system.

While the United States spends more than the rest of the world on health care, Friedman said, our life expectancy is far down the list.

"Our spending is inefficient," he said. "We're spending lots more and we're not getting the bang for our buck."

Friedman is a numbers guy. He flipped through bar charts, graphs and tables to drive home some depressing implications to his small, but rapt, audience. Americans are steadily paying more for health care as the years flow by. Care cost six percent of the average annual salary in the '70s and 20 percent in 2010. He projected the number would rise to 24 percent by 2021. Currently, the poorest Americans (the bottom 20 percent of wage earners) pay a quarter of their income while the top one percent pays 11 percent.

Friedman bemoaned the "rising tide of administrators."

"U.S. doctors spent four times as much on billing and insurance as Ontario (Canada) doctors," he said. "We have more office workers than nurses in our health care system."

The University of Massachusetts professor believes the solution is a single payer system that lowers the Medicare age to zero. Having everyone in a single risk pool would shift the burden

and lower costs dramatically, he said. Oregon could save a net \$6 billion even with more people going to the doctor. Nationally, the numbers mushroom to \$592 billion annually and \$1.8 trillion over 10 years.

He supports a bill called the Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Act (HR 676) that would provide womb to tomb coverage for all Americans.

The bill isn't new — it's been reintroduced a dozen times, most recently by Rep. John Conyers Jr. (DMI).

Friedman also predicted the eventual demise of the Affordable Care Act.

“The Affordable Care Act restricts some of the most abusive practices of health care, but it does not control costs,” he said. “Therefore, it will fail.”

Comment:

- Frank Erickson - 5 minutes ago :

It is good to see some space given to this topic on the front page. The Health Care for All Oregon organizations, the Mad As Hell Doctors, the Physicians for a National Health Program and the Mainstreet Alliance continue working to support the reforms named by Dr. Friedman during his speaking tour of Oregon last week. Unless there is passage of a Federal bill such as HR676, there will continue to be state by state efforts until single payer financing and its benefits get implemented with the expectation that eventually the United States will join the rest of the developed nations of the world in providing universal health care, preventing medical incident related bankruptcies and improving health care outcomes. Imagine businesses that no longer must pay ever-rising insurance premiums to predatory health insurance firms with ever higher deductibles and co-pays. Imagine not living in fear of a medical incident which could result in losing your home and savings. Imagine having no labor disputes over dental and medical benefits. Imagine fewer malpractice lawsuits motivated by financial hardships. Imagine all who need it getting the cost-effective preventive care and all-important mental health care. Health care is a common good. It is time we make the financing of health care work for instead of against the common good.