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My story: why Oregon should adopt health care for all

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*The Health Care for All Oregon Act, SB 631, is a bill in the Oregon Senate, written by Sen. Michael Dembrow. In brief, it will establish single-payer health coverage for all people residing or working in Oregon. The legislation will remove private insurers from the health care context and replace them with a government-financed plan. It will also establish an appropriate governing board to implement and administer the plan. All medically necessary services will be covered, and providers will be required to accept payments from the plan as payment in full. There will be no copayments or deductibles. The act also provides funding for retraining and extended unemployment benefits as necessary for any workers displaced as a result of the legislation. Here is a link to a more detailed summary of the bill: [SB 631 Summary](#)*

*The state Senate held a public hearing on the bill at the Capitol building in Salem on May 4. The bill is not yet in its final form or ready for passage, and testimony offered at the hearing was intended to introduce it, and to inspire and engage the Senate Health Care Committee in discussions that supporters hope will lead to its passage. In other words, the bill has been introduced and is now in Senate committee. But given the current political climate, it is likely that the bill will not be advanced. The general opinion of members of [Healthcare for All Oregon](#), of which I am a member, is that the bill is unlikely to pass in the legislature. They believe conditions are much more favorable to enact it via a ballot measure. An effort to place the measure before the voters in 2016 is already being discussed.*

*Below is my testimony submitted in written form in advance of the hearing. Other members of HCAO were in attendance. I was not physically present for the hearing due to other commitments.*

I'm a self-employed guy who provides administrative and documentation services to a number of clients from my home in Beaverton. My virtual assistant business shrank dramatically after the economic crash in 2008, and even at its best it didn't produce enough income to afford health insurance. I'd heard stories like this for years but never expected to end up telling one myself.

In May of 2013, I was hospitalized with a condition that required emergency surgery. I was less than 48 hours in the hospital. The bills began coming in with sonic speed, almost before I got home. There were some preliminary test charges I knew about and paid, then the hospital bill came and I thought the nightmare was over. But I started getting nicked and dined for all this other stuff, including a bill in excess of \$450 for some person I'd never seen to spend a few seconds reading the X-rays and CT scans. Then when I thought it was all over, the surgeon's bill came separately, two months later, for another \$9,000. The bills totaled nearly \$33,000. Even after negotiating for a lower amount due to my limited means, the bills wiped out my modest life savings.

Now, in my mid-50s, with no savings and less than \$17,000 a year in business income, I'm left

picking up the pieces of my life. The worst part of this is that my story is actually relatively minor compared to the catastrophes others have endured. I at least am still in my home, with some sort of income, and still able to do something to better myself. There are those who have been left homeless and crippled, or with a serious illness that leaves them with no hope of picking up any pieces.

As a Christian and a Communist, I am appalled by the callous attitude of an economic system that treats health care as a commodity to be sold for profit, instead of the fundamental human right that it is. It is recognized as such by the World Health Organization, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as most industrialized - and civilized - nations on Earth.

In the coming years, America faces a choice. She may choose to remain the playground of the filthy rich riding on the backs of the poor and the sick at the expense of working people - and fall when her people have had enough and take her down. Or she may choose to fulfill the ideals of justice and equality embodied in those beautifully worded documents on which she was founded. I hope and pray she chooses justice and really becomes the beacon of freedom to the world that she claims to be. It would be a tragedy to lose her.

Here in Oregon, we have a historic opportunity to set an example of justice, of doing the right thing by our people, the working people who make our state possible. I urge the legislature to demonstrate the common decency and humanity to create better conditions for our people by advancing this bill for universal coverage. No Oregonian, no American, no human being should have to worry about being bankrupted or rendered homeless by an illness. No man should ever be forced to choose between medicine and having food on his table. No woman should ever have to decide whether she buys medicine for her illness or milk for her babies because she can't afford both. No one should have to suffer untreated because he or she cannot afford to see a doctor.

Let's have Oregon be the beacon to America, and maybe the nation will catch our flame and do the right thing for all Americans. Recognize the human right to health care. Let's be a civilized state and join the rest of the world. Single-payer universal health care is a step in the right direction for our state and nation. My dream of a just and socialist future may not happen in our lifetimes, but single-payer health care is achievable and can help our people here and now. Advance this bill, finalize it, bring it to a vote, and pass it. Raise the torch and be an