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MY VOICE: Setting the record straight

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At recent town halls in Baker City, Elgin and Wallowa, Rep. Greg Walden, R-Oregon, asked the crowd if they supported single-payer, government run health care. Overwhelming, majorities at each location shouted their support.

Walden did his constituents a favor. By asking the question, he made a public record of their support for universal health care and their opposition to the American Health Care Act as passed by the Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Walden's question, however, distorted the concept of single-payer health care. Single-payer health care is not government run. Single-payer is government financed. Under a single-payer system each of us would get a health card good for treatment by any doctor or hospital in the United States. Care would be publicly financed but privately provided. Doctors and hospitals would function privately as they do today.

There are many other myths and lies being told about single-payer health care. Let me set the record straight about several of them.

- Single-payer will lead to rationing, like in Canada: Wrong. Today in the U.S. private health insurance companies ration care. If you can't afford health insurance, you are often out of luck. Every day, 120 Americans die from lack of health care. Zero Canadians die due to lack of insurance.
- Costs will skyrocket: Wrong. Single-payer is the only health care reform that will save enough money to insure everyone. By eliminating the health insurance industry, we will save \$500 billion or more each year in administrative costs and profits. We will then use that money to insure those who lack insurance and fully cover those who are under-insured.
- Drugs will be more difficult to get: Wrong. Most medical research is currently funded by the National Institutes of Health. Under single-payer this would grow. And drugs will be cheaper. When all patients are under one system, the payer has a lot of clout to negotiate lower drug prices. The Veterans' Administration gets a 40 percent discount on drugs because of its buying power.
- Single-payer will cover less than the insurance I have now: Wrong. All medically necessary care would be funded through single-payer, including doctor visits, hospital care, prescriptions, mental health services, nursing home care, rehab, home care, eye care and dental care. Public health funding will increase to prevent disease.
- Single-payer will cost me more than I'm paying now for private health insurance: Wrong. The vast majority of Americans will pay about the same or less than they are paying now. Instead of paying premiums to a private health insurance company, most of us will pay a similar or smaller amount in taxes. No more medical bills. No more deductibles. No more co-pays.

Single-payer health care is the only affordable way to fund universal health care in the United

States. Every other industrialized nation does it. So can we.

Rep. Walden chairs the powerful House Committee on Energy and Commerce that wrote the Walden Care legislation.

We need to ask him to redesign that legislation as a single-payer system that provides affordable, quality, comprehensive health care for all of us instead of taking health care away from 23 million Americans and causing 43,000 unnecessary deaths each year.