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Another Voice: 'Right thing to do': the time has come to enact universal health care

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Last year the CEO of United Health Care received \$14 million in compensation, which is roughly \$56,000 a day. This is a perfect example of what is so wrong with our health care system. Every year we hand over billions of dollars to private insurance companies, consuming 15 to 25 percent of each dollar spent. And what do we get in return? We get health care rationing through prior authorization, denials, deductibles, copays, pay out limits, pre-existing conditions, limited coverage, and huge premium increases. Doctors and hospitals are forced to employ armies of staff to battle for payment. All told, about 31 percent of our total health care expenditures go to administrative bureaucracy. That enormous outlay does not improve health. The only beneficiaries are the stockholders of the insurance companies. It is big business taking advantage of a captive population.

The State of Oregon recently funded a study by the independent Rand Corporation. It concluded that a publicly funded single payer system could insure every Oregonian for the same total cost as we spend today. The state would collect funds from employers and individuals, and pay doctors and hospitals. Premiums, deductibles, and copays could disappear. Total costs to individuals and families would remain about the same as now, plus every Oregonian would have health coverage.

The advantages of providing decent health care to everyone (and everyone needs health care) are something this physician can currently only dream about. Let's start with the reduction of unnecessary suffering and death from no or inadequate care. How more humane and less costly would it be if basic coverage, preventive care, and early treatment of illness were the norm? Instead, we commonly have people waiting until they are so sick that they must go to the emergency room, followed by an extended and expensive hospitalization. Universal coverage would eliminate medical bankruptcies, reduce the cost of doing business, and create jobs.

We know that universal coverage with a single payer model works. Almost every developed country in the world uses some form of single payer to provide health care to its people. They accomplish this while spending less than half of what we do, with results that are often better.

Rep. Greg Walden is one of the architects of a scheme to replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or Obamacare). Independent experts such as the Congressional Budget Office agree that the plan will deprive millions of their health insurance and will raise premiums for most citizens. I feel that Walden owes his constituents some detailed explanations. For example, how exactly will a tax credit adequately replace my ACA-supported health coverage? How will eliminating the insurance requirement not raise premiums? Can you imagine the cost of car insurance if it were made voluntary? While dropping health care for millions, is it not simply outrageous that the plan would give \$700 billion in tax breaks to the wealthy and to medical industry?

Rather than making our dysfunctional and enormously expensive health care system even worse, I would encourage Rep. Walden to join his Oregon colleagues Earl Blumenauer,

Suzanne Bonamici, and Peter DeFazio in co-sponsoring U.S. House of Representatives Bill 676, the national single payer bill. Over 100 U.S. representatives have already signed on. I urge you to contact Greg Walden. Encourage him to use his leadership, knowledge and prestige to develop a plan that delivers health care to every Oregonian and all Americans. Similarly, contact your Oregon state senators and representatives to suggest that they support SB 1046, the state single payer bill.

Health care is one of the critical issues of our time. We can join the rest of the developed world in delivering adequate health coverage to all of its citizens. I'm certain that is the right thing to do. Please make your voices heard. For more information, visit the Health Care for All of Oregon website at www.hcao.org and www.fixithealthcare.org.

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