

17<http://www.nrtoday.com/site/contact.html>

## **Medicare for all is the answer**

by Rick Staggenborg, Roseburg  
*News Review*, July 25, 2017

The failure of the attempt to reform the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare) was predictable. As with Obamacare itself, the basic problem was not addressed in the latest debate. Doing so would have challenged the Wall Street interests whose favor both parties try to curry. These are investors who benefit from a system designed to maximize profits rather than access, affordability and quality.

ACA has left nearly 30 million people uninsured. Most of these are in families with one or more full-time workers. Of those who can pay their premiums, many cannot afford to seek health care because of the costs of co-pays and deductibles. This is a significant barrier for low-income patients, including many of those whose premiums are subsidized under Obamacare. In addition, no insurance can prevent bankruptcy in the event of a catastrophic illness or injury. Sixty percent of all bankruptcies can be attributed to health care bills.

While medical insurers add nothing of value, they extract 25 to 30 percent of each health care dollar for administrative costs (both to insurers and providers), and other costs such as advertising and profit. In Western European countries that do not use insurance, overhead amounts to about 5 to 6 percent. This is similar to the cost of running Medicare. Perhaps surprisingly for those who assume that private industry is always more efficient than government programs, administrative costs alone for private insurers runs about twice as high as Medicare's entire overhead, according to the World Health Organization.

.Not that the current system of Medicare is perfect. Similar systems in other countries require the government to negotiate for drug prices. In the U.S., bargaining is outlawed under the act that established Part D. Most don't require premiums, co-pays and deductibles. These can do this while still saving money by the increased efficiency inherent in single-payer systems. For these reasons and others, single-payer advocates usually refer to an improved system of Medicare-for-all

We cannot increase coverage while lowering costs if we continue to treat health care as a commodity. Health care does not follow rules of free markets. It is not something you can choose not to buy if the price is too high, and in many areas there is no real competition. Providers of both insurance and health care services can charge excessively because the market will always bear it. What other choice do people have? These are just two of the reasons that health care costs routinely exceed overall inflation rates many times over. We cannot deal with the problem until we face the reality that we have to regulate the health care provider and insurance industries, just as we do other monopolies and near-monopolies.

Politicians are coming to the realization that the only way to save our failing health care system is to repeal Obamacare and replace it with a universal system of single-payer health care like Medicare-for-all. Sen. Merkley has been a champion of such a system since his first election campaign in 2008, when few others had the understanding, nerve and integrity to do so. A more recent convert is Peter DeFazio, who this year took action by cosigning HR 676, which would establish the basis for such a system. He is one of several Oregon members of the House who support such a system. Belatedly, they have been joined by Ron Wyden, who recently declared his support. Since he also has expressed doubts that it is politically possible, it will take pressure

to get him to translate his words into action.