

## ***Our Golden Opportunity For Real Health Care Reform***

**An E-Mail to Progressive Activists**

June 11, 2009

*[Please note the corrections, in brackets, which represent information I have since learned, and shared.]*

Dear family and friends,

"Of all our national resources, none is of more basic value than the health of our people." With that bold, undeniable statement, President Harry Truman set the stage for the national debate on health care reform, back in his State of the Union Address in 1947. In his next year's address he added: "The greatest gap in our social security structure is the lack of adequate provision for the Nation's health."

Now, over 60 years later, the debate continues, with even greater urgency. As a nation, we spend twice *[actually, half-again]* as much per capita on health care as other industrialized nations, yet our health care outcomes—measured by such life-and-death issues as infant mortality rates and life expectancies as well as by the "morbidity" of chronic, life-crippling conditions—lag far behind. We're paying too much and not even getting our money's worth!

The number one cause of personal bankruptcies is health care expenses; and in most of those cases, the person going broke had health care

insurance when he or she got ill. Under our system, of primarily employer-based health care, if you get too sick to work, you lose not only your job but also your health care coverage. And like for all those Walmart workers who can't afford health care insurance, if the sick folks eventually do get care it's from government-run programs like Medicaid. We've already got "socialized medicine" except the government's getting mostly those folks too old or sick for the private insurers to take care of: Our government is in effect subsidizing the private insurers, who take primarily the people who make the fewest claims.

But if put on a level playing field—like if all insurers, both public and private, have to take anyone who applies, regardless of pre-existing conditions (Yes, Heaven forbid, even the people who need insurance will get insurance)—then the private insurers know—they even say—they cannot compete with a public health insurance option, as the Democrats in Congress and the president are supporting: That is why the private health insurance companies are so dead-set against it. *[Actually, according to various studies, as by the Congressional Budget Office, only about 10% of Americans would probably enroll in the public option; although some other studies—which incorrectly assumed that*

*everyone, not just those without employer-based coverage, would be able to choose the public option—said up to 100 million, which the Right cites as "evidence" that the Obama Administration is trying to "socialize" medicine.]*

It's just common sense. The fact is, public-run health plans, like Medicare or Medicaid, have administrative costs that are just a fraction of those for private insurance companies: Only about five percent or less of the total budget for public plans, vs. 25 percent or more for the private plans, goes to administration, not treatment. You get "more bang for the buck" with a non-profit system vs. a for-profit system, especially when the top executives of the private health insurance companies are "skimming" billions of dollars of profit right off the top: money that should by all rights be going to care for more people and to give better care for those with insurance, rather than paying for executive compensation and perks like those for Wall Street execs, who led that industry into financial ruin.

So it won't be— it hasn't been—an easy task to reform the health care system. We are up against some very well-heeled, entrenched interests. As a business, the health care "industry" needs no reform: It is making huge amounts of money for a great many people, in insurance, pharmaceuticals, etc. But as a system that actually delivers top-quality health care to as many people who need it, almost everyone—who has horror stories among their own circle of family and friends—agrees that the system is broken.

I'm all for doctors and nurses—and even drug companies that do good research to come up with good meds—making good money. By and large, they are hard-working, dedicated people who have invested a great deal of their life, talents, and money to get to where they are, doing life-saving and life-improving work. However, when I read today in the *New York Times* online ...

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/11/us/politics/11health.html?th&emc=th>

... that the American Medical Association is opposing a public health care option, and then I read in the historical record ...

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Doc\\_Tropics/United\\_States\\_health\\_reform\\_under\\_Truman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Doc_Tropics/United_States_health_reform_under_Truman)

... that the AMA did the exact same thing to thwart Truman's bid for health care reform six decades ago, as they did to scuttle Medicare in the '30s and almost succeeded in doing again in the '60s ...

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-chris-mccoy/dear-ama-i-quit\\_b\\_214318.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-chris-mccoy/dear-ama-i-quit_b_214318.html)

... then I have to hope—and I do believe—that the times have changed. *[Like millions of others, I was glad to read that the AMA later endorsed the House bill, including a public option.]*

You see, history was indeed made back in November and January, as an African American was elected and then sworn in as president of the United States. But that history did not

happen on its own. For although Mr. Obama is so obviously a person of great intellect, persuasive speech, and compassion, he could not have reached this peak of power without his having ridden a tidal wave of broad public support, from coast to coast, even in states once "Red"—a movement motivated in large part, of course, by the dire need for change in our economy, foreign policy, and—yes—health care system but also a movement made possible, made united and thus formidable, by such grassroots means as the Internet.

So now, to all those who oppose reforming our health care system—which burdens our families, businesses, and governments with unsupportable and growing costs, in terms of lives, quality of life, and indeed money—pay heed: You now have to confront the most powerful force on Earth—the people, at large, united.

Well, as united as we choose to be. So on that note, I will share with you the e-mails below, which I (and many of you) have recently received, from the Obama Administration, two senators in the lead on this issue [Sen. Kennedy and Sen. Dodd], and that progressive dynamo MoveOn.org. If you have already taken the few moments it takes to sign their petitions of support, good for you; if you haven't, please do so now. And click through the Obama site, where there is much more information about how you can take part in this growing, grassroots movement, to do something truly historic, something at least 60 years in the making: Make health care affordable, available, and effective for all who need it, when they—we—need it, with

costs distributed as fairly as possible—all in all, not the system we have today.

Reform health care, that most stubbornly unreformed sector of our economy and society?

Yes, we can!

*[Insidiously, the Right took note of Pres. Obama's greatest strength—his popular support—and turned it—apparently—against him, by organizing and inciting the "swiftboating" of town hall meetings nationwide. They spread, through the wide-eyed (and sometimes outright biased) media, the impression of widespread popular opposition to the Democrats' reform measures—despite polls showing that majorities did indeed still support the various particulars and, by somewhat smaller majorities or pluralities, the overall packages.]*

*The strategy the Right devised—of turning faux "popular support" against real popular support—was "ingenious," in a devious sort of way; the tactics employed—virtual mob rule, sometimes even armed, and the spread of bald-faced lies—were utterly despicable, particularly given that millions of lives are literally at stake.]*