

Readers' Turn to Write

A Call for Universal Health Care

The August 26 issue of *The Times Herald* (as it was known then) featured an article by Derooy Murdock warning readers of the perils of national health care. Now, I once read a wise comment: What you see depends on where you stand. Mr. Murdock proudly aligns himself with a conservative, free-market think tank. Enough said.

As someone who believes strongly that government is “of the people, by the people, and for the people” – and that means *all* the people, I question why we have not yet joined the rest of the world in recognizing our moral obligation to assure everyone health care.

Why doesn't every man, woman, and child in our country have access to affordable health care? Why should some 46 million of us remain uninsured, and millions more hope they won't get sick because the insurance they do have offers limited coverage and demands high co-pays — while their salaries stagnate?

Why? It's not because we, the richest country in the world, can't afford to cover everyone. *All* other industrialized countries insure their people, and they spend less than we do on health care. For example, in 2004, the United States spent 16 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health care while Switzerland, with the next most expensive costs, spent 10.9 percent, Canada, 9.7 percent, and France, 9.5 percent of its GDP.

It's also not because we're just lazy, waiting around for someone to hand us a freebie. The vast majority of the uninsured are working people. The Commonwealth Fund Biennial Health Insurance Survey reports that 67 percent of the uninsured were in families where at least one person was working full time. Employees are not offered insurance or they simply cannot afford the premium and co-payment costs of the plan offered by their employer. Further, purchasing an individual or family plan is an expensive deal. In Cattaraugus County, for example, family coverage for a standard HMO can gobble up 33 percent of family income.

So, why? The primary reason we do not yet have universal health care is because *we lack the political will to make it happen*. Health care is simply not on Washington's — or Albany's — front burner.

It is time to change that, to let our elected leaders know that Americans cannot have “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” without health.

For years, citizen groups, health care advocates, unions, and faith communities throughout the country have been pushing and prodding and encouraging elected officials at both state and national level to take the helm on the issue of health care for all. And,

national polls indicate that “we the people” want it. Now, we who call the Enchanted Mountains home can add our voices to theirs.

On September 16, at Allegany-Limestone School, from 10 A.M. until noon, the Health Care Access Coalition, together with twenty-four co-sponsoring organizations from the Olean/Allegany area will host a Citizens’ Hearing on Health Care. “We the people” will come together, and, as is our democratic right, help our candidates for state and congressional office understand just what health care problems we face. Then we will listen carefully as they explain what they will do to solve them.

We will say, by our presence and with our voices, that a health care system that leaves anyone out, that squeezes the life-earnings out of us, that leaves us sick with anxiety needs changing. Elected leaders, our representatives, must make that happen.

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