

Dear Partnership for Coverage,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my ideas about our health care system. I have spent many hours over the past few years analyzing this issue; I have come to the conclusion that implementing universal health care is the single greatest opportunity to restore the faith of the American people in their government. Many Americans today view our government almost as if it was an occupying army- collecting taxes by force and interfering with their lives in an arbitrary or even corrupt manner. Restoring the role of government as a community effort for the common good would be the most important “intangible” benefit of the creation of a universal health care system.

The current crisis in health care in the United States impacts the public in two ways: a rising financial burden and decreased quality of care when compared to other industrialized societies. Both of these problems stem from the same root- inefficiency caused by multiple methods and sources of funding the system. It is estimated that overhead of the current system is ten times that of a single payer system. The difference is hundreds of billions of dollars per year, nationally. However, even the fantastic savings which are realized by universal health care does not tell the whole story; there are many other advantages, both tangible and intangible to be realized.

A single payer, universal health care system is the only one which eliminates these inefficiencies and overhead costs. Many other “fixes” which have been proposed address one aspect or another of the deficiencies in the current system. However, none address the root causes- high overhead, inefficiency, and public distrust of a system which treats health as a commodity. One other characteristic these “fixes” have in common is that they preserve the profit or the influence of the stakeholders in the current system. These stakeholders include insurance companies, labor unions, the AARP, public officials and various government entities. We must realize that the billions of dollars currently being “wasted” in the healthcare system are not being burned in a trash barrel somewhere, they’re ending up in someone’s pockets and those people are going to resist, delay, and obfuscate any attempt at real change no matter how much benefit to the common good. Those who do not derive a direct profit may be experiencing an increase of influence due to their ability to provide access to discounted rates, and public officials may find it convenient to “grandstand” about new programs which purport to increase coverage but which don’t threaten the powerful lobbyists. The current efforts at universal coverage (Child Health Plus and Family Health Plus) are visible examples of inefficiency, with thousands of people employed not in providing health care but rather as salespeople for government funded private insurance plans. All of the expenses for advertisements, promotions, office space, etc. are expenses taken away from the actual provision of health care to the public.

We must realize that there are limitations inherent to a system contained within the borders of the state of New York. New York currently pays out more dollars in Federal taxes than it receives back from the U.S. government. Some of this money is already going into programs for health care. How would our universal system be integrated with

the larger system that we are a part of? Also, the New York system provides services to many people who are not New York residents. How will our system interact with other external insurers? To what extent will the cost of interacting with these external factors decrease the gains in efficiency created by implementing a universal system in the state of New York? There would have to be a separate department set up to deal with outside insurers, to insulate the individual health care providers and preserve the efficiency advantages created by a single payer system. Despite these difficulties, I believe establishing a single payer universal system in the state of New York is the best possible solution, in the absence of a Federal universal system.

I apologize for this rather lengthy introduction. The point of this letter is to encourage you to recommend that a single payer universal health care system be adopted in the state of New York. There are many good resources available on the subject, most prominently the group Physicians for a National Health Program (<http://pnhp.org>). I would like to add to what is already available on the subject by sharing with you my own analysis of some of the additional benefits to the public which I believe will result from implementation of universal health care:

- Increased productivity- Many employees are staying with jobs which provide health insurance rather than taking positions which optimize their skills and abilities. Universal care allows employees to rise to their most productive level.
- Increased global competitiveness- American companies are at a disadvantage to foreign companies that do not have to pay for workers health insurance.
- Lower property and sales taxes- A large part of the budget in most counties in the state of New York is the “unfunded mandate” of Medicaid. A large part of the budget for most municipalities and school districts is health insurance for employees and retirees. A single payer system would remove these costs from the local property and sales tax and replace them with a more efficient and fair statewide tax system.
- Improved government services- Local governments and school districts could better focus on their primary missions when relieved of insurance obligations.
- Lower automobile insurance rates- A large part of your automobile insurance covers medical costs for injured parties. This would be unnecessary in a system in which all medical costs are already covered.
- Improved labor relations- One of the biggest points of contention in labor negotiations is health insurance, to the extent where other important issues, such as safety and productivity are neglected. Taking the issue of health insurance off the table will lead to faster contract negotiations and fewer job actions and strikes.
- Less litigation and less fraud- Our court system currently has to deal with many lawsuits to determine who should pay for medical costs. Additionally, many fraudulent lawsuits are encouraged by the large settlements based on these costs. Universal care reduces the burden on the court system and removes this incentive for fraud.

I would like to point out that all of the above advantages are in addition to the principal advantages of better quality of care, lower costs, and universal coverage which are

inherent to the single payer system. When you also factor in the intangible benefits such as increased trust in government (a priceless asset especially in emergency situations) and a general increase in the public's sense of security, you start to see the big picture of a renewed, re-energized society.

I hope you will use the power of your position to advocate for a real change in the health care system for New Yorkers. Please let me know if there's anything else I can do to help make this system, already available to the citizens of all other developed nations, a reality for the people of New York.

Sincerely,

Steven White