

Members of the Senate and House Health Care Committees
and Other Leaders in the Legislature

Since the day that a public hearing in the VT legislature on the subject of universal primary care was first announced. It has been my intention to be there in support of the plea for this important cause. This is a moral issue, a justice issue, a commonsense issue. Enacting universal primary care is the best thing that can happen in Vermont now.

I regret so much that I cannot be in Montpelier on January 23. All through the past week I have been suffering from flu-like symptoms and am not strong enough to make the trip tomorrow. Therefore, I am sending this statement and hope my plea will get attention.

Too long in America access to health care has been left to those who can afford it. It's a personal responsibility, some say; people should take care of themselves and not have their hand out for help from others. Too long, I say, this sentiment has ruled the day in America. In a great, wealthy country people can and should do much better caring for each other. In other nations, where health care is provided for everyone, people feel more secure and live happier lives.

I want to give some examples worthy of note. (I realize that my experience speaks to universal health care, not just universal primary care, but I believe these examples will be useful in the discussion tomorrow.) Some years ago, my wife and I were visiting her relatives in Scotland. I developed a nosebleed that couldn't be stopped. At 9:00 p.m. we went to an emergency room. For three hours I received a doctor's care and left the hospital O.K. Would Medicare pay? No, not in another country. How much would it cost? Answer there: "There will be no charge for something as small as this." Three hours in the ER with excellent care. And, this was provided for a foreigner!

More recently, we were traveling in Newfoundland, Canada. We struck up a conversation with a shop owner who told us his shop would be closed the next day because he was to have open heart surgery. He was "upset" about what it would cost him. He said, "They will charge me \$5/day to have TV in my hospital room!" We have friends and relatives all across Canada; not a one of them would give up the health care system they have. They regret that buying health coverage for any time they travel in the U.S. makes travel here more expensive.

One more example, perhaps my best one: In 2011 my wife and I traveled in New Zealand. Nowhere in the world have we felt so welcomed as we were there. One evening we stopped for an early dinner; we were the first people there and the owner had time to talk with us. He was an American from the state of Georgia. His wife's parents had been visiting from the US, and her mother became seriously ill. She was taken to a local hospital and from there to the leading hospital in New Zealand in Auckland. Again, it was determined that she needed more

specialized care that could be provided in New Zealand. She and her husband were put on a plane for Sydney, Australia, where she received life-saving surgery. The government of New Zealand payed for this, not any private insurance, and not the person who became ill. Imagine a country with such compassion that all the citizens support a government-funded plan that takes care of everyone!!!

In this country we are told that such a plan would be too expensive. Why should we believe that? Anyone willing to look beyond our borders discovers that other so called "advanced nations" that provide health care for all are spending substantially less on health care than we are here.

Is it not simple common sense to understand that taking care of people when they first become ill will be less expensive than waiting until they have to be treated in an ER and sometimes discover a serious illness that could have been stopped if it had been treated earlier?

There are other issues to be discussed at the hearing. I leave those issues to others and end my testimony here. Now is the time to do something brave and important for all in Vermont. The federal government is stymied by wealth and greed that convinces too many Americans that government can do nothing right. But, this is Vermont. Our legislators are responsible to us, not to high paid lobbyists.

Now is the time for Universal Primary Care!

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