

## Health Care Reform Battle Heats Up

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Probably the only topic on which most Americans agree is that we must fix our health care system. It affects all of us, and costs more than two trillion dollars each year. Health care reform is coming. We have to decide what it will look like.

Our tradition of employer-paid health insurance began as the soldiers returned to their jobs after World War II. Now, the cost of health insurance is a major factor forcing employers to drop coverage, move overseas, or close completely. It's time to move beyond that method of health insurance coverage. We need a system that makes sense and works for everyone.

A universal health care system covers everyone. It does not necessarily mean that the government will pay all of the costs of the care. In a single-payer system, all costs are paid by one entity, usually the government. There is a difference between the quality of the health care available in the U.S. and the quality of our health care system. American hospitals, doctors, and other care providers are among the best in the world. But when so many Americans can't afford to see a doctor, and must choose between buying food and buying medicine, then our health care system is a farce.

During his campaign, President Obama promised that everyone will have a seat at the table. Now he refuses to discuss the single payer option at all. On May 8, Obama established the White House Office of Health Reform. He met with leaders of the health care industry and labor unions on May 11. After that meeting, he announced the three principles that our reform must achieve. It must reduce costs, guarantee choice of doctors, and ensure that all Americans have quality, affordable health care. He wants to sign a bill by the end of this year.

During recent hearings, Sen. Max Baucus, D-MT, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, had police remove an audience member who objected when Baucus would not permit single-payer advocates to speak. So where is the seat at the table?

There is single-payer legislation pending at both the federal and state levels. H.R. 676, the United States National Health Care Act, would cover all Americans while saving \$387 billion per year.<sup>1</sup> The Family and Business Health Care Security Act, HB 1660 and SB 400, is a single-payer, universal health insurance bill for Pennsylvania. Health Care for All Pennsylvanians, a nonprofit organization, is working for its passage in Harrisburg. Their Web site, listed below, lists 101 reasons why single payer health care works for Pennsylvania. The state bills are endorsed by the Pittsburgh City and Allegheny County Councils and by state Sen. Wayne Fontana, D-42, Brookline.

Some legislators oppose the single-payer concept because they think it's impossible to pay for it. Others are controlled by the health insurance industry. Still others have an irrational fear of "socialism". However, two major polls, one by ABC in 2003 and one by CBS in 2009 show that nearly two-thirds of Americans want universal, single-payer health care paid for by the government.<sup>2</sup>

One million Pennsylvania citizens have no health coverage of any kind. Health care expenses are the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 47 million Americans are uninsured. Yet the U.S. spends more on health care than industrialized countries that provide health insurance to all of their citizens.<sup>4</sup>

AFL-CIO research found that from 2002 to 2006, health insurance companies' profits rose 1,084 percent. And that's during a time when more than eight million people lost their health insurance. Like all companies, their goal is to make a profit. They make profits by reducing costs. They reduce costs by preventing all of us from getting health care.

Every year, 18,000 Americans die because they can't get health care. And I know that you know people who need care and can't get it. In the early days of our country, our leaders decided that it was in the nation's best interest to have free, accessible education for all of our children. Now we take public education for granted, and no one calls it "socialism". Access to health care is no different from access to education. It's in our best interest.

We can design the system any way we want to. We can avoid the mistakes that other countries made. But the health insurance companies don't want change. They'll fight hard. During the next few months, we'll see endless advertisements lying about the bills and about single-payer systems. We have to fight harder. Call your state and federal legislators today. Go to [www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov). Click "contact elected officials".

For more information, go to Health Care for All Pennsylvanians at [www.healthcare4allpa.org](http://www.healthcare4allpa.org); National Coalition on Health Care at [www.nhc.org](http://www.nhc.org), [www.officials.org](http://www.officials.org), and the White House Office of Health Reform at [www.healthreform.gov](http://www.healthreform.gov).

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