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Health Care: How Does the Right Keep Getting Away with Saying Government is Inefficient?

Solidarity America

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Many years ago, there was a meeting in New York City where a Washington union representative was explaining how we might get health care coverage for everyone. Unfortunately, the crux of the presentation was that coverage for all was to come from making the existing system more equitable. The existing system - if it was such - was based primarily on the insurance industry and its considerable profits.

Now we know that this improvement in the existing system never came to pass and we find ourselves with health care that leaves 47 million without access to health care and probably another equal amount with inadequate health care.

It's like the unemployment figures from the federal and state governments: if the official rates are doubled, that probably comes close to the actual rate. For years, the official rate did not count those who had outlasted their unemployment benefit and either had given up looking for work (therefore, not counted as unemployed) or had taken a job at a quarter or a third of the previous pay (not counted as unemployed) or were working part time at a much lower rate of pay.

So it is with health insurance. Millions of people think they are covered by either a plan they pay for directly or by a plan they get from the employer, usually paying some part of the premium. These are the people who, when they try to use the insurance, find

that it is inadequate for the problem or sickness they have and, very often, they are forced into bankruptcy because they can't pay for an operation or treatment that costs beyond their insurance coverage.

No one who works full time and believes he or she has health insurance should be forced to pay out of pocket. But that's how untold numbers of young people have been forced into bankruptcy. It never should happen.

Amazingly, workers with this level of health insurance - that is, it is adequate insurance if you never become seriously ill or injured - are not included in the statistics of those without health insurance. They should be, so the number of those with no health care coverage or inadequate coverage could be as high as one-third of the U.S. population, or 100 million men, women, and children.

You can see that America's recordkeeping on things that matter to working people is inadequate and the inaccuracies allow those who control the economy and, to a very great extent, government policy can continue to minimize the problems of the whole society.

We've come a long way from the earliest proposals for universal coverage for health care, which in the modern era was Truman's attempt to get coverage for everyone. Some unions have tried for the past half-century to get coverage for all. Most of these attempts have been buried by those on the political and economic right, who prefer a kind of survival-of-the-fittest system for virtually everything.

That leaves us asking what kind of society and nation we've become, because the arguments that we hear today coming out of the mouths of Republicans in Congress and elsewhere are essentially the same as they were during the early days of the Cold War, the time of McCarthyism. The Democrats, after a half-century, are held off by the same fears that caused them to back off from full universal health care.

They don't want the Republicans to call them socialists.

It doesn't matter to them that the U.S. is the only so-called developed country that leaves a large percentage of its people in the dust when it comes to health care. They fear being called socialist more than they fear all of the suffering and death that comes from a lack of a basic human right.

For some, our lack of health care for all has come to be like the weather...it's just there and nothing can be done about it. For others, it is a matter of ideology - universal single-payer health care would just be another step toward socialism, even communism! Never mind that not even the Tories in Great Britain or the Conservatives in Canada or the right wing in France would ever think of reducing or eliminating their system of health care for all.

Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., has introduced HR 676, Expanded and Improved Medicare for All, which would cover everyone for all of their health needs, including dental, prescription drugs, and long-term care. It would be paid for by the savings that would come from taking the profit out of the current system.

At that New York City meeting all those years ago, the union legislative representative

was asked this: If Medicare can operate its system of health care coverage for everyone 65 and older at administrative costs of about 4.5 percent and it takes the private insurers as much as 25-30 percent or more for administrative costs, how can we keep letting the opposition get away with saying that government is "inefficient?"

"I don't know," he said. Well, it's 2009 and there's still no answer. Fact is, opponents keep saying the same things they've said for 50 years and we're no closer to universal coverage, except for HR 676 (which has 90 co-sponsors in the House).

We're still told today that the country isn't ready for it, but polls show that the people are overwhelmingly ready - it's just that the politicians, corporate lobbyists, and other powers are not ready for it. The lie keeps being repeated, that "government can't do it...only the private sector can do it."

America's economic crisis is the best example of what the private sector can do or can't do. The private sector has shown that it can't survive on greed without help from the government. If a fraction of the money that has been handed to corporations on a plate (by us inefficient folks who are supposed to *be* the government), had been handed over to the Medicare system, there would be plenty of money for HR 676, with money to spare for other human needs.

The financial sector plunge is about to take the country with it. It's time to stop listening to the addled brains of public life whose mantra is, "small government or no government...that's the solution to all of our troubles."

We don't need the government for everything, but we need it for many things. Universal, single-payer health care is one of those vital things. We can't afford to leave it in the hands of the private insurance industry another day.


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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, John Funciello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funciello.

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