

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine  
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
analysis and investigations on issues affecting  
African Americans and the African world.

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**No B.S.:**  
**We Need REAL National Healthcare!**  
**The African World**  
**By Bill Fletcher, Jr.**  
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The other day I went to a community meeting sponsored by my Congressional Representative, Ms. Donna Edwards. Donna Edwards is a very progressive, long-time activist in Prince George's County, Maryland. The meeting was organized for the purpose of going over, with her constituents, some of the issues and challenges that she is facing on Capitol Hill.

I listened to the comments. Nearly all the people who raised questions/issues raised personal problems that they are facing due to the economic crisis (in that sense, they were actually not "personal"). One of the comments particularly struck me. A woman, probably in her 40s, who is the owner of a small business, has been completely unable to obtain health insurance. The insurance companies, according to her, have given myriad excuses as to why she is NOT eligible. There was a moment when the woman was close to tears, pulling back at the last minute from completely letting go.

While Congresswoman Edwards supplied her with a good and supportive response, the bottom line is that the challenge facing this woman and at least 44 million other individuals cannot be resolved individually. Add to that, however, is the point that film-maker Michael Moore so well documented in *Sicko*: even for those of us with healthcare, it is largely tied to whatever job we happen to have...if we have a job.

My wife told me a story of a friend whose daughter is now no longer eligible to be

covered by her mother's healthcare plan due to her age and being out of school. So, she is out of luck. While you are in your 20s (as is this young woman), you can think you are immortal and pretend not to need healthcare insurance, but that illusion soon evaporates, particularly if you are a woman and want to consider having children. So, if this young woman either has no job or has a job without healthcare insurance, she is s.o.l. [and I will not bother spelling out that acronym...take a guess].

President Obama has discussed the need for healthcare reform and some version of universal coverage but will not go as far as supporting what is known as "*single payer*" healthcare. Single payer means, in essence, Medicare for all, i.e., that the insurance companies are OUT of the equation entirely and that the program is a government program, much like healthcare coverage in most of the rest of the world. In other words, just like unemployment insurance, everyone is entitled to it. Congress Rep. John Conyers from Michigan, along with Ohio Congress Rep. Dennis Kucinich, have been two of the most prominent and consistent supporters of single payer healthcare on Capitol Hill.

I keep trying to figure out why President Obama has retreated from supporting Single Payer. Why do we need the insurance companies in healthcare? How can we reduce the overall costs of healthcare if there are companies trying to make a buck, speculating on whether we are going to live or die? Why do we need the insecurity that comes with employer-based healthcare?

Let me just focus on this last point. As repeatedly demonstrated and documented, most of the personal bankruptcies that have been declared over the last 10+ years have been the direct result of healthcare costs that individuals have been unable to assume. So, we in the USA end up having the worst of both worlds: we have private, employer-based healthcare on the one hand (which means that you need to have a job that offers healthcare, which employers are not obligated to do), and on the other, we have Republican-imposed bankruptcy laws that make it very difficult for individuals - rather than corporations! - to declare bankruptcy, particularly if they find themselves overwhelmed with healthcare expenses.

President Obama has declared that reforming healthcare is near the top of his agenda. I think we should take him at his word. In doing so, we need to remind him that there is a need to push for a solution to the healthcare crisis that addresses the nature and scope of the problem. Partial answers, such as the healthcare plan in Massachusetts that mandates that everyone PURCHASE healthcare insurance, but continues to rely on private insurance companies, does nothing to reduce costs, increase efficiency, or guarantee that if one loses one's job - which is a very real thing in an economic recession - that one will have *quality* healthcare coverage for you and your family that does more than keep you breathing.

*Yes, President Obama, we need true universal healthcare, and that is known as single payer.* Let's join the rest of the world in a more civilized approach toward the health and well-being of the population, rather than throwing bones to the insurance companies.

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