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A Warning on SCOTUS Health Care Decision: "Needs Still Unmet" Solidarity America By John Funicello BC Columnist

The U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision that the president's health care law is constitutional caused a flurry of celebration on the part of proponents of reform and a vow on the part of Republicans and other on the right to deep six the plan, along with the president.

Proponents of reform see the decision as a step in the right direction and those who oppose taking control of U.S. health care out of the hands of the insurance companies and the pharmaceutical companies have vowed to work tirelessly to defeat the idea of universal health care.

Then, there is the other viewpoint, not necessarily in the middle, but a more objective view of the state of America's health and the "system" that is, indeed, controlled by nameless, faceless bureaucrats out of Corporate America. Top Republicans in Congress, like Sen. Mitch McConnell and House Speaker John Boehner, are doing their best to see that corporate bureaucrats will continue to stand between patients and their doctors (or other health care practitioners). They have a lot of help.

That other viewpoint is from Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), a group formed 25 years ago for a single purpose, to help develop and pass a single-payer universal health plan for America.

When the Supreme Court released its decision, PNHP stated that so-called Obamacare "is not a remedy to our health care crisis."

In short, the reasons: "(1) it will not achieve universal coverage, as it leaves at least 26 million uninsured, (2) it will not make health care affordable to Americans with insurance, because of high co-pays and gaps in coverage that leave patients vulnerable to financial ruin in the event of serious illness, and (3) it will not control costs."

The legislation, which President Obama spent the first half of his first term attempting to get passed with bi-partisan support, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), is full of shortcomings that will become obvious immediately and some that will take some time to recognize. But the main problem with the ACA, according to PNHP and many others, is that the act "perpetuates a dominant role for the private insurance industry. Each year, that industry siphons off hundreds of billions of health care dollars for overhead, profit and the paperwork it demands from doctors and hospitals; it denies care in order to increase insurers' bottom line; and it obstructs any serious effort to control costs."

PNHP and its 18,000 members across the country have a remedy that is clear and simple. They have been advocating a piece of legislation that was introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., years ago, HR 676. It also is called "Expanded and Improved Medicare for All."

HR 676 would, literally, take the current Medicare program that provides health care for those who are 65 or older (with some exceptions like prescription drugs and dental, unless you have supplemental coverage) and provide that same care for all. That was not what was envisioned by Obama and the Democratic leadership at the beginning of the fight over a new health care law. When Nancy Pelosi took the speaker's gavel in the House of Representatives, one of the first things she pronounced was, "Single payer health care is off the table." Things went downhill from there.

On the stump in the early days of the Obama Administration, Democratic legislators held what were called town hall meetings with constituents. Nearly every meeting was disrupted by self-described Tea Party members, who plunged the meetings into chaos. Little was learned about the reform proposal. Possibly, not much more is known today, but one thing is certain. Those same Tea Party members, or people with the same inclinations, remain unalterably opposed to universal health care of any kind.

Right-wingers seem to believe that Mitt Romney, who is awaiting coronation as the 2012 Republican presidential candidate, is just as opposed as they are to the Supreme Court-blessed (by a 5-4 decision) ACA. Few of them seem to know that Romney's legacy, as governor to the people of Massachusetts, is virtually the same health care program that Obama signed and the court has upheld.

This puts Romney foursquare at war with himself, but that's not an unusual position for him to be in. He now has to say that he is opposed to the federal health care reform law, thus denouncing his own legacy in the Bay State. And, he doesn't seem to be getting any better at keeping his foot out of his mouth.

For example, during the GOP presidential primaries, he responded to a member of the audience with this gem: "Corporations are people, too, my friend." Although he seemed completely unaware of the lives of working men and women, he should have known that millions of Americans know that corporations are not people, that they have powerful control over their daily lives, and that the U.S. Supreme Court gave Corporate America the right of free speech that was intended to protect citizens, not corporations, in its *Citizens United* decision. That decision has loosed the power of unlimited money into the political system, polluting it beyond all reason. Romney does not know this.

The trouble with both his Massachusetts universal health care law and the one just upheld by the court is that both leave the power and the profit in the hands of Corporate America, more particularly, its constituent corporations of the insurance, pharmaceutical, and related "industries." Their power is not curbed in very many ways under either law, one of the problems being that there is no control over premiums, which translate into obscene profits, obscene CEO salaries and benefits, and similar treatment for all of top management in a host of corporations connected to the medical care industry (for many, even the use of the term is distasteful).

Contrary to what politicians and their benefactors in Corporate America say about a single-payer system of health care, PNHP noted recently: "Research shows the savings in administrative costs alone under a single-payer plan would amount to \$400 billion annually, enough to provide quality coverage to everyone with no overall increase in U.S. health spending. The major provisions of the ACA do not go into effect until 2014. Although we will be counseled to "wait and see" how this reform plays out, we've seen how comparable plans have worked in

Massachusetts and other states. Those "reforms" have invariably failed our patients, foundering on the shoals of skyrocketing costs, even as the private insurers have continued to amass vast fortunes."

Considering the savings, what does it mean that Mitt Romney, Republicans in general, and the right-wingers of every stripe are frothing at the mouth in their attempt to be the most rabidly against the so-called reform? It means that there is a simple choice in the minds of the GOP and all of those in full support of the status quo. They want nothing to interfere with the massive transfer of wealth to the corporations that are in control of the current health care non-system. If that means leaving tens of millions out of the system, with no access to health care, so be it. After all, these are the politicians' benefactors, those who pay their bills.

"The American people desperately need a universal health system that delivers comprehensive, equitable, compassionate and high-quality care, with free choice of provider and no financial barriers to access," PNHP stated after the court's decision was announced. "Polls have repeatedly shown an improved Medicare for all, which meets these criteria, is the remedy preferred by two-thirds of the population. A solid majority of the medical profession now favors such an approach, as well."

What brought the country to accepting this pathetic "reform?" For starters, Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi, and other Democratic leaders and operatives took off the table the only proposal (HR 676) that made sense, if there truly were to be reform. They went to the bargaining table with the Republicans, so to speak, giving them their last best offer as an opener. If the president had been a union bargainer and had made such a proposal at the opening session of contract talks, he would have been yanked from the bargaining committee as if by shepherd's crook.

To those who say that we must move toward universal health care in America incrementally, it must be pointed out that that's what Harry Truman must have thought, back in the late 1940s, when he mulled national health care. It was only 60 years ago, and we're still debating whether we should provide health care for all.

If we leave it to Mitt Romney to provide universal health care in America, it may be another 60 years before it happens and, if we approach "reform" the way President Obama and the Democrats have done, it'll give Romney's timetable a big boost.

(For a PNHP fact sheet on HR 676, visit www.pnhp.org.)

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