

Other Views

Reduce costs and provide health care for all

One month ago, I wrote about three areas in which the U.S. needed to catch up with the rest of the world's wealthy nations: health care, education and child care for workers. Of these, the most urgent and obvious area requiring immediate attention is health care. Why? Because we spend

twice as much money as a percent of GDP than the other countries in the Organization for Economic



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Cooperation and Development and get worse results. In addition, they all cover every citizen while, as of 2019, 28.9 million Americans were uninsured.

Our results? The U.S. ranks 40th in the world in life expectancy at birth, 78.5, while Japan ranks first at 84.3.

The U.S. ranks 37th in the world in life expectancy at age 60, 83.1, while Japan ranks first at 86.3.

The U.S. ranks 47th in the world in infant mortality — 6.5 per 1,000 live births — behind all of Western Europe and Japan. Even Russia is better at 5.8 per 1,000 live births.

I could go on, but you probably get the message at this point. This country spends extravagantly on health care as a percent of our GDP, produces poor results and does not insure everyone. In fact, according to a 2019 study by the American Journal of Public Health, 66.5% of personal bankruptcies in the U.S. are due to medical issues. Spending more and producing low-quality results is not a winning formula. The U.S. health care system can only be described as the worst of all worlds. Can anyone look at these facts and disagree?

There are two questions we should probably be asking ourselves: 1) How did we let it get this horrible? and 2) Why aren't our representatives and senators falling all over themselves to fix it? If I can get the above information, we know that they can as well.

First of all, fundamental Republican ideology assumes that the free market will always work better than the government. In many cases this is true and is the foundation for our capitalist system. The free market works well when competition restrains prices. For example, if Chevy priced their Silverado \$20,000 higher than a comparable Ford F-150, they would have a hard time selling their trucks. In health care, however, competition is minimal and prices are not readily available, so cost-control is virtually nonexistent. Imagine that you are at home in Portland and are hit with an incredibly painful appendicitis attack. Your wife helpfully calls the EMTs but, in the meantime, might you be out on the web trying to find the hospital with the lowest prices? Is this information even decipherable?

From a Republican perspective, our health care system is working exactly as intended in that it is creating wealth; we have the highest paid doctors in the world and our health care companies, up and down the food chain, are highly profitable. To Republicans, the fact that we spend more than other countries, produce miserable results and leave 30 million Americans uninsured is irrelevant compared to industry profitability.

There has been an attempt at a fix. The Affordable Care Act was passed and signed into law by former President Barack Obama in March 2010. The ACA fell significantly short of being a total solution, but it did solve the problem of those who, through a job change, could not obtain affordable insurance due to a preexisting condition. Through its additional funding of Medicaid and availability of insurance through health insurance exchanges, coverage was expanded by roughly 20 million people. Unfortunately, it did very little to address the cost of either services or pharmaceuticals.

The U.S. health care system is obviously broken; the statistics don't lie. What should voters say to any congressman or senator who isn't working toward a solution that reduces costs and provides health care for all? "You're fired!"

Rich Belzer served as director of federal marketing for a NYSE-listed computer company and was subsequently a senior executive with two NASDAQ-listed high-tech companies. He moved to Bend to join Columbia Aircraft where he became vice president of worldwide sales.

Editor's Note

Do you have a point you'd like to make or an issue you feel strongly about? Submit a letter to the editor or a guest column.



Other Views

Poetry can lift us up in troubled times



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It's here again — National Poetry Month. If you were taught, as poet Billy Collins joked, that you had to "tie a poem to a chair and beat a confession out of it ... to find out what it really means," you might flinch at the very idea.

But in this pandemic year, more and more people have found themselves turning to poetry not only to help face their pain, but also to remember moments of light. Thanks to people who shared some of their own favorites this month, I found Ashland poet Angela Howe Decker's poem about waking to watch her young boys who have crept into their parents' bed "like cats or friendly spirits" and before dawn are "great wizards in small bodies, / arms outstretched above their heads, / drawing deep swells of breath and / pulling the morning toward us."

And January Gill O'Neil's poem "In the Company of Women": "Make me laugh over coffee, / make it a double, make it frothy / so it seethes in our delight. / ... Let the bitterness sink to the bottom of our lives. / Let us take this joy to go."

If you're looking for poems that lift your spirits, you could try Naomi Shihab Nye's "Kindness," Wendell Berry's "The Peace of Wild Things," or almost anything by Ted Kooser,

who is sharing new poems on Facebook nearly every day.

Last month, I found myself sitting on the floor beside the bookcase where I'd shelved the books I brought home from my mother's bedroom. Here was Carl Sandburg's "Harvest Poems," complete with the receipt from my hometown's Owl Rexall Drug. Forty-seven cents — the receipt dated March 21, a day that has since been designated as World Poetry Day and the same day, in 2021, that I happened to be reading.

Was it a coincidence that I could hear her quoting Sandburg, telling the wrens nesting just above our door, "People of the eaves, I wish you good morning, I wish you a thousand thanks"?

In "The Pocket Book of Verse" she had bookmarked "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," "To a Skylark," "Jenny Kissed Me," and Robert Frost's "Two Look at Two." Again, I could almost hear her voice, reading that poem to me when my teenaged life seemed too much to bear. She is still offering me guidance; the slip of paper she kept on her kitchen bulletin board and that is now on mine reminds me — in lines she copied from Frost's poem about a glass of cider — "I'd catch another bubble if I waited. / The thing was to get now and then elated."

Poetry can help us confront hard truths, too. I think of "Facing It," Yusef Komunyakaa's poem about visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall. Or this from Joy Harjo's

"A Postcolonial Tale": "The children were in school / learning subtraction with guns."

Wendy Rose's poem about the Wounded Knee Massacre — inspired by the art auction of shirts and leggings and cradleboards stripped from those frozen bodies — gives voice to a mother's unspeakable grief. "Would've put her in my mouth like a snake / if I could, would've turned her into a bush / or rock if there'd been magic enough / to work such changes. Not enough magic / to stop the bullets, not enough magic / to stop the scientists, not enough magic / to stop the money."

What poetry does at its best, I suppose, is help us address the question Mary Oliver asks in "A Summer Day": "Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? / Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?"

We know this much: Poetry can be a path toward truth. "Say it plain: that many have died for this day," Elizabeth Alexander reminded us at Barack Obama's inauguration. And we won't soon forget Amanda Gorman at the podium in January inspiring a shaken nation. "Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true, / that even as we grieved, we grew, that even as we hurt, we hoped, that even as we tired, we tried."

Stay strong. And happy National Poetry Month.

Bette Husted is a writer and a student of tai chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.

Letter

Compare U.K. health care model with U.S.

Thank you to Dick Mason for his article (March 23, 2021) covering the recent Union County chapter online meeting of Health Care for All Oregon when Wayne Hill and his wife, Lynn Relfe, reported on their experiences with the National Health Service in England, which is part of the United Kingdom. Since Wayne is my brother, I have more NHS information that I'd like to add to Mason's fine coverage.

Each NHS eligible person chooses their own family practice group and one of the group's physicians. When specialists or tests are needed, a referral is made (immediately for emergencies). The NHS in the U.K.

fully covers routine care including vision, dental, prescriptions and cancer treatments. A few of the additional services, at no extra cost, include:

1. Ambulance: Members are registered with a local ambulance service, which gives paramedics vital medical information before an emergency.
2. Phone-in service: People can call 111 in the U.K. and receive care from a medical care provider through a telephone office visit (this service has been vital during COVID-19).
3. House calls: NHS doctors make house calls.

The NHS does have some problems. There are non-covered medications and treatments, as with U.S. health insurance companies. Those treatments not covered by NHS are still available — paid for out-of-pocket or through privately purchased insurance.

Purchasing optional private insur-

ance can also speed up elective surgery. However, the patient receives the same quality of care since the same private practice surgeons also work for the NHS.

The National Health Service in the United Kingdom certainly offers its members greater care for less money than the for-profit private system does in the United States.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development data published in 2019 states the U.K. spent just \$4,653 per person for a life expectancy of 81.3 years while the U.S. spent \$11,072, for a shorter life expectancy of 78.7 years.

To learn more about the information presented here and join in the movement to improve U.S. health care, send an email to unioncounty@hcao.org.

*Vivian Young
La Grande*

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