

Compared to the current system and other reform proposals, Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman told a New Jersey gathering last month, “all the evidence is single payer is cheaper.”

BETTER. Studies have repeatedly shown that countries with single payer systems have healthier people. Governments direct health care spending into care that provides the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people rather than refusing, delaying and rationing claim payments and coverage to provide the greatest profits.

Japan spends about two thirds less per person than the U.S. on universal government health care while enjoying a preventable death rate a third lower, according to the *Post*.

Eugene courthouse protester Kyle Yamada said he's lived with health care in the U.S. and Canada and far prefers the Canadian system. The Canadian system cost only a small fraction of what insurers charged in the U.S., and “it's top notch,” he said. “We never had to wait.”

LESS BUREAUCRACY. The current private insurance system has a huge bureaucracy that consumes an estimated one out of every three health care dollars on paperwork. Eliminating this cost alone would generate enough savings to provide coverage to all of the uninsured.

Eysenbach said he used to work in the health industry sifting “mounds” of paperwork. “The message was clear,” he said. “The single most equitable way, the cheapest way, was through the single payer option.”

SIMPLICITY. Efforts to appease the health care industry and other special interests have added baffling complexity to the Obama proposal, leaving most voters confused and ignorant about what they are buying. But single payer would be easier and straightforward — expanding Medicare for everyone.

DOABLE. Obama is struggling to get his plan through Congress. The original timetable of getting it done this summer may be slipping. Pundits are speculating that insurance industry opposition may force Obama to drop a key component — a public option of government insurance designed to assure competition.

Insurers, drug companies and their Republican allies have attacked the public

option as socialized medicine. Industry opponents would make the same argument about single payer. But while the confusing Obama plan hasn't generated much grass roots excitement, single payer has the energetic support of the activist Democratic base to push it through.

Progressives have a long list of arguments for single payer, but most haven't been heard. Single payer supporters don't enjoy the seats at D.C. hearings and negotiating tables the insurance and health care industry lobbyists bought. The industry spent \$167 million on campaign contributions last year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP).

Just over half the campaign contributions went to Democrats. Obama brought in \$19 million. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, criticized for pushing a plan that doesn't include a public option, was among the top 10 percent of health care industry beneficiaries in Congress with \$1.4 million in contributions.

The health care industry is also spending \$1.4 million a day, almost a half billion dollars a year, to lobby Congress using a battalion of former Congressional staffers and Congressmen, according to CRP. The lobbying effort runs so deep that the *Washington Post* was recently scandalized by a scheme to allow lobbyists to pay for access to its journalists.

“They [insurers] take our money and then use it to lobby against us,” said Ruth Miller at the Eugene rally. Miller said she was denied insurance due to diabetes and forced into an inadequate high risk plan that consumes most of her income.

“If you have anything wrong, they're going to deny you,” said Janet Barker, who's also struggled to find affordable insurance. “I'm so mad.”

Although many leading Democrats admit to the advantages of a single payer system, they continue to marginalize it. At a town hall meeting on health care reform last month, Obama responded to a call for single payer from a small businesswoman. The President said, “There are some appealing things to a single-payer plan, and there are some countries where that's worked very well.” But he joked, “There have been proposals to have, essentially, Medicare for all, a single-payer plan for all Americans, and — that person likes it.”

Actually, polls show as many as two-thirds of Americans like a single payer system over the current system.

“There's more people willing to step

up now; the problem is Congress,” said Forrest who's helping to organize a single payer rally and fundraiser for Friday, July 17 (see sidebar). “We want them to start talking about single payer and stop talking like there's no votes.”

Many at the Eugene courthouse protest said if they can't get single payer, Obama's public option could be a step in the right direction to an eventual single payer system and a strategic compromise. “Shoot for single payer, and they'll compromise down from there,” said Ken Rivernider.

But five decades of failed attempts at health reform may show money still counts more than votes in American politics.

Local grassroots activist Ruth Duemler, who's campaigned on the issue for decades, said a failed Oregon single payer initiative was drowned in opposition spending in 2002. “There's too much money against it,” she said. Duemler said she's focusing now on a campaign finance reform amendment to the state constitution. “Campaign finance reform is what we need now. We'd be heard instead of just money.” **EW**

rally&sing

Local single payer activists have planned a rally and fundraiser concert for Friday, July 17.

The “Single Payer Now” rally in support of House (HR 676) and Senate (S 703) bills now before Congress is planed for noon Friday at the U.S. Federal Courthouse, 405 E. 8th Avenue. The rally is sponsored by the Eugene Springfield Solidarity Network (ESSN), the local branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the local AFSCME union.

That same night, the “Sing Out for Single Payer, Health Care Roadshow” is coming to Eugene. The “donations welcome” event features labor singer Anne Feeney as well as Adam & Chris, Raina Rose, Jason Luckett, Trevor Smith and Patrick Dodd.

The Sing Out begins at 8:30 pm, Friday July 17 at the Very Little Theater, 2350 Hilyard Street. Sing Out sponsors include ESSN/Jobs with Justice, Health Care for All Oregon, Universal Health Care for Oregon and AFSCME. Email essn@efn.org or call 736-9041 for information.

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