

OPINION

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System Squeezes the Most Vulnerable

Charging more for hospital care

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

More than 40 million Americans do not have health insurance. They simply can't afford it. So it makes no sense that when uninsured individuals receive hospital care, they are charged more than those who do have insurance. Why are the uninsured being overcharged?

Insurance companies negotiate rates for their customers; if you don't have insurance, you lose out on that benefit. This is just another example of how big business squeezes the most vulnerable among us. And it's yet another sign that points to the growing need for universal healthcare in this country.

A recently released study shows that, in many cases, the uninsured are charged more than 2.5 times the rates that insured patients are charged at hospitals. There has always been a gap between what the insured and uninsured are charged, but that gap has widened considerably in the last 10 years.



Why do hospitals charge people with exactly the same injury different amounts, based on whether or not they have insurance? If the injury is the same, if the treatment received is the same, shouldn't the cost be the same?

Hospitals over charge the uninsured to compensate for the millions of dollars they lose each year in unpaid medical bills. As a result, a person who is on shaky financial ground may receive a bill that is nearly three times higher than someone who is insured. To make matters worse, this individual could be subject to aggressive debt collectors; hospitals have stepped up their collections process in recent years. Hospitals and lawmakers have been heavily criticized for this practice, and rightly so.

Despite the scrutiny, no plan has been developed to level medical costs for the uninsured.

Allowing hospitals to squeeze the uninsured with marked-up rates is wrong, plain and simple. This practice must end, immediately. A universal healthcare program could solve this problem - for all of those involved.

Universal healthcare will ensure that those in need of medical care can receive it, without having to worry about how they'll pay the bill. It will also guarantee that healthcare providers will be paid

for their services. The current healthcare system does not work for every American. It must be fixed. Lawmakers must turn their attention to universal healthcare and explore how they

can make this a reality and not just a campaign concept. Perhaps this new Democratic Congress can move this issue forward. Or maybe the crop of presidential hopefuls will breathe new life in this ongoing

discussion.

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An Antiwar Message that Resonates

Dr. King's 1967 speech parallels today's war

BY ERIC STONER

Forty years ago last month, on April 4, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. rose to the pulpit of New York's Riverside Church to deliver his first public antiwar speech regarding Vietnam. As anticipated, critics railed against him roundly at the time, not only those from the mainstream media, but also from allies such as the NAACP. Now, however, history has vindicated the truths that Dr. King so bravely spoke that day,



and his testimony is widely seen as a prophetic masterpiece.

While still mesmerizing, the address can also be disconcerting.

By simply swapping the word "Iraq" for "Vietnam," and "terrorism" for "communism," Dr. King's speech literally could be given today.

Before describing how the United States betrayed the Vietnamese, first by supporting "the French in their abortive effort to re-colonize Vietnam," then by propping up the "vicious" dictator Diem, and finally by nearly wiping the country off the map through its extensive bombing and use of napalm, Dr. King said: "They must see Americans as strange lib-

erators."

In Iraq, parallels abound. The United States supported Saddam Hussein as he massacred his own people during the 1980s, obliterated the country during the first Gulf War, imposed deadly sanctions for nearly 13 years, and finally invaded and occupied it in 2003.

offensive action in behalf of justice. We must with positive action seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity, and injustice, which are the fertile soil in which the seed of communism grows and develop . . ."

The same undoubtedly can be said for terrorism, which cannot be defeated by violence.

By simply swapping the word "Iraq" for "Vietnam," and "terrorism" for "communism," Dr. King's speech literally could be given today.

In place of napalm, the U.S. military now uses a more effective chemical to burn Iraqis - white phosphorous. And in our noble effort to bring democracy, we've also littered the country with cluster bombs and thousands of tons of poisonous depleted uranium. Strange liberators, indeed.

Speaking of the soldiers, Dr. King said: "We are adding cynicism to the process of death, for they must know after a short period there that none of the things we claim to be fighting for are really involved. Before long they must know that their government has sent them into a struggle among Vietnamese, and the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy, and the secure, while we create a hell for the poor."

One can only imagine the cognitive dissonance of our soldiers today, knowing that every reason that they originally were given to kill and be killed has been thoroughly debunked. Moreover, the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority's effort to privatize nearly everything in Iraq, and our current advocacy for Iraq's new oil law -- which if passed by the Iraqi Parliament will be highly advantageous to American oil companies -- can leave little doubt whose side we're currently on.

Speaking on the bogeyman of his time, Dr. King declared: "War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs or nuclear weapons."

The greatest defense against communism, he argued, "is to take

Even the U.S. intelligence community has concluded that our wars have only worsened the threat of another attack and fanned the flames of extremism.

Dr. King is perhaps most relevant today, however, when he takes that extra step in his analysis to address the roots of the conflict. "The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit," he noted, brought on by "the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism."

Calling the U.S. government "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today," Dr. King issued a piercing warning that reaches us across the decades loud and clear: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

As the bloated Pentagon budget swells further - this year to over \$600 billion - America becomes more of a one-trick pony, known the world over not for its kindness and generosity, but rather its brutality and quick trigger.

While that spiritual death seems closer now than ever, I believe Dr. King would still hold out the hope that we could live up to ourselves. To do so, we must snap out of our culturally induced coma and lead that "revolution of values" of which we are so desperately in need.

Eric Stoner has written on peace and international affairs for several publications, including "The Nation" and the "Peoria Journal Star."

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