

OPINION

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Healthcare that Bankrupts Families

Disgraceful system needs overhaul

BY JIM HIGHTOWER
America's corporatized health care system keeps producing unpleasant surprises.



We've known for some time that this system, which puts profit above care, is morally bankrupt—but now we learn that it's bankrupting hun-

dreds of thousands of American families. In fact, the system's exorbitant medical bills have become the No. 1 cause of personal bankruptcies in the USA

Researchers from Harvard and Ohio State recently conducted a national, random-sample survey of more than 2,300 families who filed for

bankruptcy in 2007. As they report in the American Journal of Medicine, 60 percent of those families were forced over the edge by high health care bills. The situation is likely much worse today, since this survey was taken before the current spike in job losses.

Here's an even more sobering finding: The great majority of those bankrupted were not uninsured poor folks, but

middle-class, well-educated people—75 percent of whom had health insurance!

As one of the researchers, Dr. David Himmelstein, put it: "Unless you're Warren Buffett, your family is just one serious illness away from bankruptcy."

What a disgrace for the richest country in the history of the world. Indeed, America's deplorable connection between physical illness and fis-

cal disaster does not occur in other highly developed countries, because they provide national health insurance for all of their citizens.

Yet, too many of our representatives in Washington don't really want to change our current system of health care profiteering. Instead, they merely want to tinker with reform by extending our corporatized system to more people. That will

neither improve health care nor prevent more of those financial catastrophes.

We need a complete overhaul of the system by adopting a single-payer method of insurance coverage for everyone.

To help push change that works, contact Physicians for a National Health Program at www.pnhp.org.

Jim Hightower is a national columnist.

ACORN & US

BY WILLIAM REED

How many Black Americans are actually buying into rants against the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now? By now most Blacks have heard of ACORN and some are involved in bogus babble defaming an organization that has demonstrated positive intent toward communities where we live. Before Blacks join chattering classes against ACORN, its work on our behalf should be considered.

ACORN has brought about better housing and wages for the poor, more community development investment from banks and governments and better public schools. ACORN is the nation's largest grassroots community organization of low- and moderate-income people with over 400,000 member families in more than 1,200 neighborhood chapters. ACORN helps people historically "locked out" become more powerful players in America's system. Since 1970, ACORN has built community organizations committed to social and economic justice and through direct action and legislative advocacy won thousands of issues of direct concern to Blacks. While mainstream media portrays ACORN, and its politics, negatively; Blacks cannot ignore the organization's economic empowerment inside their traditional communities.

As some Blacks join in partisans' scorn for ACORN, others of us recall its community organizing efforts that pressured banks to provide home ownership opportunities for working people, raised workers' wages, got traffic lights at dangerous intersections and increased police protection in low-income neighborhoods, and helped many families there avoid foreclosures. ACORN is comprised of distinct non-profit entities that include a nationwide umbrella organization that performs lobbying; local chapters established as non-partisan

charities; and an ACORN Housing Corporation. ACORN and affiliates advocate for affordable housing by urging development, rehabilitation and establishment of housing trust funds at the local, state, and federal levels. The group also pushes for enforcement of affordable-housing requirements for developers, promotes programs to help homeowners repair homes and organize tenant demands. ACORN built the minimum wage movement that helped lift low-waged poor out of poverty. Local ACORN efforts in the late 1990s led to the 2007 minimum wage laws. ACORN was at the forefront protesting sub prime loans that were pushing people into mortgage foreclosure in the 1990s; and campaigned against predatory, high interest and deceitful mortgage loans. ACORN reports it delivered approximately \$15 billion in direct monetary benefits to its members and constituents over the past 10 years. Mainstream media neglects to report that every scholar who has conducted recent evaluations of ACORN found that it to be a good community force. Too often, Blacks who've moved to suburbia buy into the established order and mindset at the expense of their own kind/kin.

Blacks should not evaluate ACORN based on politics; but for its economic and social-equity practices organizing poor people, mainly those of color, to fight for their rights in housing, education, etc. Such community activism is against the political right's version of the "American Way". ACORN does not rely on government funds and will survive the right's attacks. But if ACORN is to restore its strength as an effective disenfranchised and national poor people's organization, it will need the support of beneficiaries of its works.

William Reed — on the web at www.BlackPressInternational.com



A Failed Drug War

BY SANHO TREE



President Barack Obama's drug czar, Gil Kerlikowske, should be commended for initiating some basic reforms in U.S. drug policy. One of his first sensible acts was to drop the phrase War on Drugs.

"Regardless of how you try to explain to people that it's a 'war on drugs' or a 'war on a product,' people see a war as a war on them," he explained. "We're not at war with people in this country."

As the former chief of the Seattle Police, Kerlikowske lived under some of the most progressive drug laws in the nation. When it comes to addressing the basic premise of our failed drug policies, however, he's trapped in a linguistic box.

When asked about the "L" word, his oft-repeated re-

sponse is "Legalization is not in my vocabulary nor is it in the president's vocabulary."

That word isn't in my political vocabulary either. It's a clumsy term that polarizes the debate and bars the nuanced discussion we need to have.

The debate over illegal drugs today is cleaved into a false dichotomy of two polar extremes: prohibition versus legalization. That's partly thanks to our laws. Title VII in the Office of National Drug Control Policy Reauthorization Act of 1998 says the office shall "take such actions as necessary to oppose any attempt to legalize" drugs currently deemed illicit.

Drug czars who respond otherwise would be fired, in all likelihood. This is because drug warriors have spent years co-opting the term, making it so radioactive that many voters think legalization means "anything goes" free-market anarchy. To them, the term evokes

Question now is what comes next?

images of selling heroin in candy machines to children.

What we need is regulation instead of prohibition, because we need to have more control over these substances, not less. Because we have witnessed the damage illicit drugs can cause, we have allowed ourselves to fall prey to one of the drug warriors' great myths: Keeping drugs illegal will protect us.

But drug prohibition doesn't mean we control drugs; it means we give up the right to control them because we can't regulate an industry we drive underground. We have made a deliberate choice not to regulate these drugs and are paying the price for the chaos that followed. These are lessons we failed to learn from our disastrous attempt at alcohol prohibition in the 1920s.

The debate reminds me of the old story popularly attributed to Winston Churchill.

At a dinner party one night,

a drunken Churchill asked an aristocratic woman whether she would sleep with him for a million pounds. "Maybe," the woman said coyly. "Would you sleep with me for one pound?" Churchill then asked, "Of course not, what kind of woman do you think I am?" the woman responded indignantly.

"Madam, we've already established what kind of woman you are," replied Churchill, "now we're just negotiating the price."

Once we bring the drug debate into the broad spectrum of regulatory solutions, many options are back on the table and we can "negotiate the price." Some of us favor stricter regulation and others more liberal (depending on the drug).

Sanho Tree is a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive multi-issue think tank where he directs its Drug Policy project.

Rooney Rule May be Good for Business

Could bring in more minority talent

BY MARC H. MORIAL



With overall unemployment now at 9.8 percent and the African American unemployment rate tipping the scales at a whopping 15.4 percent, it would be a tempting but fatal mistake for corporate America to take its eye off the ball when it comes to increasing diversity within its leadership ranks. In fact, I suggest that business take a lesson from the way the NFL has used the "Rooney Rule" in recent years to improve its historically abysmal record of hiring African American head coaches. The Rooney rule, in place since 2003 and named for Pittsburgh Steelers owner and NFL diversity workforce committee chairman Dan Rooney, requires that any NFL team with a head coaching vacancy must interview at least one minority candidate for the job or face a fine. I believe

it's time for corporate America to consider a similar approach to improve both quality and diversity in its CEO and upper management ranks.

Since the NFL's adoption of the Rooney Rule for the 2003 season, the number of African American head coaches has jumped from two in 2002 to six today. Two Black head coaches — Tony Dungy and Mike Tomlin — have won Super Bowl championships. And many of these coaches credit the Rooney rule for opening a long-shut door of opportunity. It is also clear that for several of their teams the rule has had a positive effect on team performance. It has allowed highly qualified head coaching prospects who would never have had the opportunity, the chance to make their teams better.

The overall numbers are still low. African Americans com-

prise about 70 percent of NFL players, while the percentage of Black coaches now stands at about 20 percent. But, the Rooney Rule has meant progress and it has been so well received by team owners that in June the NFL extended it to the hiring of General Managers and other high level front office positions.

Corporate America could well reap similar benefits by following the Rooney rule model. Black Enterprise Magazine lists just nine African American CEOs in its 2009 listing of the 100 Most Powerful African Americans in Corporate America. The magazine also publishes an annual list of the top 40 companies in America for workforce diversity. But, by any measure, Black CEOs and other African American top executives are still a rarity at most Fortune 500 companies.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.



Dr. Billy R. Flowers

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A: Drugs work primarily on relieving pain, but not on treating the

cause of the headache. What's more, drugs have serious side effects. The only side effects of Chiropractic are relief from pain and a healing of the cause of pain. To find out how Chiropractic could help relieve your headaches or for answers to any questions you might have about your health, please call us at the telephone number listed directly below.

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