

# OPINION

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## Time to Support Real Health Reform

### Make your voices heard

BY MARC H. MORIAL

African Americans, who have the highest rates of chronic disease and make up the largest percentage of the uninsured, should be especially pleased that in the last few weeks, Congress has acted to bring us closer than ever to comprehensive health care legislation that will make health insurance accessible and affordable for all.

The U.S. House of Representatives has unveiled its version of health care reform. Previously, the Senate announced it is nearing the introduction of

its own bill. Both bills are designed to lower costs, and provide more security and stability for people who already have health insurance and to provide affordable insurance to those who don't.

The House bill provides the best starting point. It covers more of the uninsured, and also includes measures to increase health care equity by expanding Medicaid eligibility, protecting Medicare, making new investments in community health centers and providing free preventive services.

The House bill also contains a public option provision that still needs to be improved. That is why the National Urban League along with the Congressional Black Caucus and the

Black Leadership Forum, an alliance of more than 30 African American civil rights and service organizations, have joined forces to ensure that a final bill includes a Robust Public Option like Medicare.

issue of affordability.

The House bill's public option would negotiate payment rates with health care providers. That's not good enough. We believe that only a robust public option like Medicare will

rum, which I chair, is encouraging citizens to flood Congress with visits, e-mails, telephone calls, faxes and social media, to make our point clear: No triggers. No opt out. We need a robust public option like Medicare.

To make your voice heard, call your Senator at 202-224-3121 or e-mail [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov). You can reach your Congressman in the House of Representatives by calling 202-225-3121 or e-mailing [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov).

A recent Harvard study documents that more than 45,000 Americans die each year due to lack of health insurance. And while this is an issue affecting all Americans, it is especially critical for African Americans. More than 1 in 5 African Americans are without

health insurance, we have the highest rates of chronic disease and we spend a higher percentage of our income on health care.

Clearly, passage of comprehensive health care reform is not only an economic imperative; it is a moral imperative and a matter of life and death, especially for Black America.

The National Urban League, the Congressional Black Caucus and the Black Leadership Forum are working hard for a robust Public Option like Medicare and a final bill that is worthy of the American people. We are close, but we need your support to get to the finish line.

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



**No triggers. No opt out. We need a robust public option like Medicare.**

Access to an option for government-issued health care will provide competition for private health providers, lower costs and help to close the healthcare gap. We must be wary of imposing a mandate for health insurance without addressing the

actually expand accessibility and lower costs, not only for African Americans, but for all Americans. But, now that Congress has spoken, it is time for the American people to make their voices heard.

The Black Leadership Fo-

## Making Money and Paying a \$10 Tax

### Corporations use system to pay the minimum

BY CHARLES SHEKETTOFF

If you ask a corporation, "Did you make money last year?" its response may well be, "Who's asking?"

It's no secret that corporations keep two sets of books, one for shareholders and one for tax authorities. Those books employ different definitions of what it means to make money, which explains why in the same year corporations can report profits to shareholders and have no taxable income on their tax returns.

It also explains why some financially healthy, profitable corporations doing business in Oregon end up paying the corporate minimum tax.

That's not what you'll hear from some of the opponents of Measure 67 on the January ballot. That measure would raise Oregon's corporate minimum tax, which has been stuck at \$10 for over 75 years.

Consider, for example, the statement by Associated Oregon Industries lobbyist J.L. Wilson at a recent legislative committee hearing on the ballot language. He said that the ballots should include the statement that "companies that pay the corporate minimum tax do so because they have no in-

come."

But that's wrong.

Some corporations paying the \$10 minimum have income, though they may or may not have "taxable income."

What is "taxable income?" It's the term used by the IRS to define the income left after a company subtracts business expenses and other deductions under tax code accounting rules, not general accounting rules -- "profits for tax purposes," in plain English.

Acts by the Legislature can change a company's "taxable income," even if real-world profits remain the same. For instance, Oregon stopped looking at the extent of payroll and property that multistate corporations have in Oregon to apportion the share of their total U.S. profits that Oregon can tax.

Large manufacturers with people and property here saw their Oregon "taxable income" -- and thus their Oregon tax liability -- drop significantly, with no impact on the pre-tax profits the corporations reported to shareholders. Corporate profits for tax purposes went down, not real profits.

So how do so many profitable C-corporations end up paying the \$10 minimum tax?

Some of them use tax subsidies -- credits -- to reduce their tax liability to zero.

But the vast majority of profitable C-corporations that have paid only the minimum tax rely on the tax code accounting rule known as "loss carry forward," which allows corporations to apply losses from prior years to the current year to reduce their Oregon taxable income to zero or less.

In other words, these companies made money in the tax year, but paid just \$10 in income taxes because at some point in the not-too-distant past they lost money and are allowed to subtract those earlier losses to make their current profits disappear for tax liability purposes.

Finally, a few corporations use a combination of tax credits and the loss carry-forward rule to get to the \$10 minimum.

And it's not necessarily corporations with only a few hundred or a few thousand dollars of profits that manage to reduce their taxable income to zero or less on corporate tax returns. Indeed, among those that paid only the \$10 minimum tax in 2006 were 31 C-corporations with taxable income of \$1 million or more.

## Letter to the Editor

### Rain but Still a Game

Some people don't know where to start and others do not know how to not swing. Although I hesitated to pick up this bat, I knew that it was time for someone to pitch hit before the clean-up batter came up.

Therefore, as a self-designated hitter, there is no incertitude. I know both how and where to swing in order to get on base. Oftentimes hitters of such caliber are deliberately walked. But whatever type pitcher on the mound, they usually get on base. Once there, no one wonders who's on first? They will be closely watched because they are also known from scouting reports for their running capabilities.

Over the past few weeks the Major Baseball Leagues have had a series of playoff games, leading to the World Series. Simultaneously, there has been a lot of pitching, swinging and pitch hitting in the local political arena.

Articles appearing in local Portland newspapers have been very interesting to fans, key players and bystanders in both left and right fields. Rookies in the dugouts and customers sitting in the last row of the centerfield bleachers are seeing the game even during rainy innings.

Starting in late August a considerable number of pitches have been thrown towards home plate and around the horn. One is HINI, better known as "swine flu". This ball was

pitched so fast at first, but delivery has been so slow, that no one seems to know if there is enough speed to reach home plate.

Within the same delivery cycle, Tri-Met Rider Advocates were on the chopping block while the Mayor welcomed the arrival of a new, same day Amtrak service between Portland and Vancouver, British Columbia.

I know that these are different agencies cooperating in an international playing field. Moreover, in terms of ongoing transactions, two local entities collaborate in a Free Ride Zone. Maybe if half-fares were charged downtown, where most riders can afford to pay, the Tri-Met Advocates could still be working and "monitoring potential flash points" around their former base of operations.

One other pitch delivered, a dead-locked percentage curb, had another mayor fighting for "his political life because of a controversial stance on tolls for a new I-5 bridge over the Columbia River."

To keep this \$4.2 billion Columbia River crossing project on track, political heads might be rolling. I wonder if the \$472,000 non-renewed contract terminating the Rider Advocates, in comparison, could even be considered as a drop in the bucket of this political rain game.

Tipping my Yankee cap, I bid you all so long and a fare well.

O.B. Hill  
Community Historian

## Lobbyists Take a Soak, On Us

### And public needs go down the drain



BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Here's a startling tally: 13,000.

That's the number of corporate lobbyists in Washington, D.C. Adding to their clout are the thousands of corporate executives who jet into our nation's capital city periodically for closed-door sessions with key lawmakers and regulators.

If you wonder why such crying public needs as health care for all and environmental protection are constantly bent to serve private corporate interests, look to this army of hired guns and executive-suite dandies.

But let's concede that influence-peddling can be hard work. Such tasks as glad-handing and passing out campaign contributions-that'll tucker you out.

That's why the Ritz-Carlton is so crucial to the system. This swank hotel is a Washington oasis for frazzled lobbyists and executives. For one thing, no tacky tourists are there to bother the swells, since room rates at the Ritz start at \$599 a night and run up to \$5,800.

Then there're the little touches.

For example, where else do guests get a "Bath Menu" in their room? "Choose from an assortment of butler-drawn baths to ease your concerns," says the menu. "A personal attendant will be pleased to draw the bath of your choice."

The menu offers The Inaugural Bath, with mineral salts "from the depths of the bright blue sea"; The Capitol Bath, with lavender, sea salts, and a libation of your choice; and The Cherry Blossom Bath-actually, rose petals are substituted for cherry, but you do get a glass of champagne and strawberries.

Each bath adds 50 bucks to the bill of the soaking influence peddler. But hey, as the Bath Menu explains, a little rub-a-dub-dub is not an expense, it's "a reward at the end of a successful business day."

They soak us, then they take a soak, writing the whole thing off as the cost of doing business.

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, public speaker, and author of *Swim against the Current: Even a Dead Fish Can go with the Flow*.

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