

OPINION

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A Step in the Right Direction

Supporting the health care compromise

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The Senate made history by passing legislation that would overhaul the nation's health insurance system. Though the bill still has to be merged with the one the House passed in November before it can be signed into law by President Obama, this current crop of legislators has come farther than any other in working to make sure Americans have needed healthcare coverage. The legislation, however, may not see the light of day if some state's attorneys have their way.

Attorney Generals from 10 states are working to challenge the consti-

tutionality of the bill's requirement that every individual buy health insurance. They are also looking to use the fact that some senators, in exchange for their vote, received benefits for their state to form the basis of their legal challenge.

For example, Democratic Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska was a hold-out and didn't decide to vote for the bill's passage until he ensured his state would get \$100 million in benefits to under the new law.

If passed, the government would require, for the first time, that every American carry some type of health insurance; support would be provided to help those who cannot afford to pay for insurance on their own. Employers would be encouraged to provide insurance for employees via tax

credits and the insurance industry would not be allowed to deny benefits or charge higher premiums for those with pre-existing conditions such as diabetes.

Passing such monumental legislation – estimated to cost nearly \$1 trillion over 10 years – has been no easy task. Previous administra-

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tions have attempted similar fetes but their efforts were bogged down in political red tape. Concessions had to be made along the way and lawmakers from every state worked to ensure the interests of their constituents were at least partially reflected in the bill.

This bill is far from perfect but is a much needed step in the right

direction. If this goes to the Supreme Court for decision – and it may if the suits are found to have merit – all of this work could be for naught. The current court is dominated by conservative Republicans who share the views of those politicians who refused to support this healthcare bill.

The Attorney Generals who wish to stop the passage of the bill should think about the elderly woman who, because of the high cost of medication, cannot afford insulin to manage her diabetes or of the young boy who died from a tooth infection because his parents didn't have medical care and couldn't take him to the doctor. These are the types of stories that fuel the desire to begin the real task of reforming America's healthcare system.

Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court judge and syndicated television show judge.

A Young Life Gone Too Soon

Finding hope and love from tragedy

by Everett Rice

On the last day of 2009, I sat down at my desk at home and reflected on the year 2009. Like many others, and unlike some, I was blessed to see another year and hopefully by His Grace, seeing 2010.

After reviewing the events and contemplating what I learned and grew from this year, I found myself drawn to a moment that happened just three days earlier. Without knowing it, I walked onto a scene that I didn't expect. At about 4 p.m., I along with others found myself in the middle of a tragedy.

A 15 year old youth had fallen from a parking structure on the corner of Sixth and Washington. Not knowing what the crowds were looking at, it hit me when I saw a body partially covered by police in front of the office store on the corner. The gravity and the tragedy of the situation changed the mood of all who had gathered and watched the scene.

That 15 year old I didn't know changed my life because I realized that it could have been anyone's child, anyone's son, daughter, brother, sister, grand son, grand daughter. The scene of the partially covered body with visibly distraught family members, the screams, and a child's stroller are etched forever in my mind's eye. I keep seeing my children's faces in the face of that 15 year old.

No it wasn't a jumper! It was a 15 year old child who has family, friends, and people who didn't even know him or her, grieving to this day. I grieve not just for this child, but for all those youth, adults and throw-aways our society overlooked, walked by and ignored in 2009, and were delayed, inconvenienced and held up by tragedies such as occurred at Sixth and Washington.

As a result of a tragedy in 2009, I hug my wife, children, grand children, family, and friends harder when I see them, as I have had a wake up call from a youth and family I didn't even know.

Everett Rice is a member of the Portland Human Rights Commission and a minister with Emmanuel Temple Church.



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