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Subject: Op-Ed response to the SOTU

Mr. Obama, “A Better Approach”

“If anyone from either party has a better approach that will bring down premiums, bring down the deficit, cover the uninsured, strengthen Medicare for seniors, and stop insurance company abuses, let me know.” In his State of the Union address Wednesday night, the President admitted that his plan for healthcare reform has run into trouble.

Mr. Obama has often said, “If I were starting from scratch, if we didn't have a system in which employers had typically provided health care, I would go with a single payer system.” A single payer system is not some sort of European socialistic concoction.

Medicare, the universal system that takes care of our seniors, is just such a system. It is an American legacy that we can be proud of, running 3% overhead, as opposed to private insurance's 20%. Many an American in their late 50's and early 60's can't wait until they turn 65 and reach the safety of Medicare coverage.

Is it time to “start from scratch”? The Democrats surrendered in advance to the private insurers and drug companies who profit from our dysfunctional health financing system, and now the American people find themselves confused, frightened, and frustrated.

I'm not letting the Republicans off the hook either. They have scorned bipartisanship and embraced obstructionism. Back home in Indiana, Indianapolis-based Anthem/WellPoint reported fourth quarter profits of \$2.7 billion - despite losing 1.4 million customers in 2009. Premiums were up, and the stock price has more than doubled since last March.

There is something wrong with this picture. WellPoint's profits are soaring as they cover a million fewer people. Those of us paying the premiums should be alarmed. They have spent tens of millions on lobbying this year, and now that the Supreme Court ruling eliminates limits on corporate spending, their huge pot of cash will buy even more influence.

A single payer, improved Medicare-for-All reform would lower costs, cover the uninsured, and upgrade coverage for most insured Americans. It would prove sustainable and hugely popular. Ask anyone over 65. Under Medicare, patients have the freedom to choose their doctor and hospital and are free from the fear of financial catastrophe. An easy way to start moving in that direction was suggested last month in the Senate – begin by expanding Medicare down to age 55. It's a compelling argument.

The cost of doing nothing, of giving up on fixing our broken healthcare system, is too great. We know that rising premiums and the lagging economy will cause even more employers to drop health benefits. As more of us become uninsured, research predicts that at least 45 thousand will die this year from lack of access to medical care, and millions will go bankrupt.

Tell the President and Congress there is one national security issue, one economic security issue, that we must push forward on – quality, affordable healthcare for all. The issues are not simple and the forces against reform are powerful, but we have come this far, too far to turn back.

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