

Jim Winkler spoke at a January 24, 2007, press conference hosted by Healthcare-NOW! at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Here is his statement.

How to Get Healthy

by Jim Winkler

I speak today as national co-chair of Healthcare-NOW!, a growing movement committed to a national quality healthcare system with single-payer financing and as general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church. Our denomination supports a single-payer health insurance program.

Last night President Bush highlighted the crisis of affordable and available health care in his State of the Union address. He would not have given this matter as much time and attention as he did if we were not in the middle of an unfolding tragedy. He noted that “many” Americans cannot afford a health insurance policy. “Many” is an interesting word choice. I think we’ve reached a point where the use of phrases such as “tens of millions” and “too many” are the only ones that work.

One could argue that instead he chose to focus on solutions. Very well. It may be that his recommendation for a standard tax deduction for health insurance will help. He says this will mean more than 100 million men, women, and children who are now covered—already covered, that is—will benefit from lower tax bills.

The President also says the tax deduction will put a basic, private health insurance plan within the reach of those Americans who cannot purchase health insurance on their own. The question before us today is whether we say, “Thank you, Mr. President, for giving some help to the American people” or do we say, “This is not the time for half or quarter or one-eighth measures?” The answer to that is clear: we must have a better and comprehensive single-payer solution to this problem.

The President says the best health care decisions are made not by government and insurance companies, but by patients and their doctors. Yet, he remains committed to the insurance companies. They have to get their vig [I had to look this up. It means: 1.any additional payment that somebody is forced to make, for example, a bribe or interest paid to a usurer. RS], their cut, of the health care dollar. Every city in the United States has one or more tall buildings dotting its skyline built by the insurance companies from the excess money they have collected from ordinary Americans. This is money that could be used for better and less expensive health care, for clinics and doctors and nurses, for education and prevention.

And yet these skyscrapers stand as monuments to corporate egos, undeserved profits, and greed. This wasted money prevents patients and doctors from making the best health care decisions. What we want is to eliminate the middle man, the corporate paper-pushers who have bought up the politicians of both

major parties in our land, so that health care can become efficient and trustworthy.

Just last night, I was reading the February 2007 issue of Money magazine. Allyson Rannallo of Westlake Village, Calif., wrote to Ellen McGirt who pens the “Money Helps” column. Ms. Rannallo said her husband was treated at an urgent-care facility last March. Afterward she and her husband called their health insurer to confirm this was covered and they were told it was. They mailed the receipt and waited to be reimbursed. They followed up repeatedly and did not receive a check.

Ms. McGirt intervened on their behalf. PacifiCare spokeswoman Cheryl Randolph investigated and found their paperwork fell into “a bureaucratic black hole.” Randolph was mystified as to why the claim was refused. Eventually, they received their check. There are far, far too many people facing the same insurance company denials and obfuscation who do not have a magazine ombudsperson to intervene on their behalf.

Throughout the scriptures, God warns us that nations and rulers who do not care for the sick and the poor and the widows and the orphans will fall, that those nations are corrupt and rotten. Ours is a nation filled with people who study and believe the Bible, but too many have been seduced by the false gods of the market ideology.

Private health insurance has failed us. “Surging” private health insurance will fail just as “surging” the war in Iraq will fail. When you are going down the wrong road, the answer is not to continue traveling in the wrong direction more forcefully. It is to go down the right road.

Date: 1/24/2007

©2005-2006

The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church is the international public policy and social action agency mandated to speak its convictions to the church and to the world. Only General Conference speaks for The United Methodist Church as a whole.