

From: The Tompkins County Health Care Task Force

To: The New York State Department of Health and New York State Department of Insurance.

Information supplied to the DOH and DOI for the purpose of reforming New York's dysfunctional health care system.

The director of the Tompkins County Health Care Task Force has been involved in health care reform for over 25 years. Our office is located in Ithaca, New York. Our organization recommends a "single-payer health care system for New York. Under a single-payer system and only under a single-payer system will New York be able to have an affordable and quality health care system for its residents.

A single-payer system (unless underfunded) which exists in every other industrialized country in the world, is: affordable and cost efficient, comprehensive, universal, promotes prevention and early intervention, includes a mental health parity, eliminates disparities in access, addresses special needs and underserved populations, and most of all promotes quality. A single-payer system maximizes consumer choice to choose a physician or health care provider. Single-payer is easy to use and reduces paperwork. Finally a single-payer system provides adequate and timely payments to providers, addresses the need for adequate numbers of qualified health care providers and fosters a strong network of health care facilities.

The Governor of New York, Eliot Spitzer, says that "we cannot achieve the goal of affordable and universal health care for all New Yorkers unless we first restructure our health care delivery system to lower health care costs". We say, that we won't be able to lower health care cost until we eliminate for-profit health care insurance companies, and use a single-payer system to bargain for prescription drugs. In the last six years private premiums have gone up 87 percent, health care delivery costs have gone up less than half of that, wages have gone up 18 percent and inflation has gone up 20 percent. Who is really to blame for this mess? Well For-profit health care has ripped us off and the government let them get away with it. The Democrats say they are for open and honest government and they will do away with republican corruption. Well let's see some action! We are supporting three Democrats in New York who are running for New York Senate and US Congress and part of their platform is a single-payer health care system.

The only way to make health insurance affordable is to go to a single-payer system. If you wish to make health care affordable for every resident of New York then put all New Yorkers in one risk pool, provide all residents with essential health care and eliminate health care dollars going to private insurance companies. Affordability is not insurmountable, all it takes is for the governor to stand up to for-profit health care industry and focus his efforts on New York. Our new health care system must be comprehensive. It must cover all essential health care for all New Yorkers. In order for the system to be universal it must cover all with quality health care coverage. You can't give good coverage to some people and poor coverage to others and call it universal. This is what Massachusetts is doing to its people in the name of universal coverage, and then they make the phony claim that everybody is covered. Massachusetts health care system is not reform at all its still built on the ability to pay and not on the needs of its citizens. The whole system is a hoax.

If New York wants to save money, cover everybody with the essentials and include care that most don't have coverage for right now; like eye and dental care, home care and prescription drugs. Negotiate for prescription drugs and stop using this country as a door mat for drug companies.

What promotes quality? First, is the quality education of our health care providers. Money saved by going to a single-payer system can pay for their education, and quality education will insure an adequate number of qualified health care providers. Second, a single-payer system provides the ground work for a better network of facilities, and electronic billing. President Bush says that America has universal coverage because everybody can go to the emergency room for care.

This is not practicing quality and cost effective medicine. The use of a primary physician and follow-up would much improve quality of health care in America.

Healthcare providers deserve to be paid well and the money they charge for services should be reimbursed promptly. People should be free to choose the health care provider of their choice. Choosing health care insurance plans in this country has very little value, but choosing a facility and a physician that best serves your needs is very important. Nobody knows today what their private health care policy covers unless you have a very good lawyer. Policies explaining your benefits used to be a few pages long now they are about 60 pages long. For-profit health care in this country is becoming a more and more of a monopoly with fewer and fewer drug companies. Where are the anti-trust laws in this country.

A health care system should provide continuity of coverage and care for all its residents. The United States provides very little portability. This I think is one of the most important benefits of a single-payer plan. The freedoms to travel or change jobs and know one will be covered for any emergency is a benefit necessary for the security and well-being of any potential patient.

Our health care system must be changed soon. Last Year 500,000 families went bankrupt because of health care bills. Most of these bankruptcies occurred even though people thought they had good coverage. People are going without their medicine and/or food. Every year 18,000 people die in the United States because they lack health care coverage and military personnel come home from war and can't get the proper health care they need. If we wait until 2010 the cost of our health care will be \$3.4 trillion and who knows how many more will be left out of the system or reporting in to the emergency room for care. Certainly using the emergency room for primary care is no way to save money, \$600 dollars for an emergency room visit is no bargain.

There is hidden cost that nobody thinks of when paying for health care such as the bodily injury portion of auto-insurance premiums or the amount of our taxes that go toward the health costs of workman's compensation. Or how much of your property taxes go for paying for New York County's Medicaid and employee health care and how much extra does it cost in property taxes to pay for school employee health care?

The Tompkins County Health Care Task Force is going across New York to every county to try and get them to pass a single-payer health care resolution. So far we have been to about 26 counties and eight have passed such a bill. We have found that 60% of a county's property tax goes for Medicaid and employee health care.

Surely we must get costs under control, but from day one Governor Spitzer should have come out and made known that he supports a Single-payer health care system for New York. Just like the New York State Assembly and New York State Senate should come out in support of their New York single-payer bills. Every New York Congressional (all 29 of them) should be signed on to House Bill HR 676 and Senator Schumer and Senator Clinton should introduce a single-payer bill in the US Senate.

Thank-You,  
Bernie Fetterly  
The Tompkins County Health Care Task Force