

A public option is essential

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As a family physician, I see too many people who are either uninsured or underinsured. This is not because they don't feel like paying, but because they have either lost their jobs, are self-employed and can't afford the premiums or have pre-existing conditions and so are refused insurance coverage.

I recently heard that some people oppose any health-care reform because they don't want to pay for other people's insurance. First of all, that is extremely selfish. Health care is a right for all Americans.

We pay taxes to pay for interstate highways. If someone doesn't drive or doesn't drive across state lines, should he or she not help pay for the highways? Should each of us hire our own security and fire protection? Why should our taxes pay for fire services if we never have a fire in our house? Should public schools be closed, and only private schools exist? These are all public services that serve the common good.

Second, we are already paying for the uninsured because those with health insurance are paying higher fees to cover those who don't pay.

More than 20,000 Americans die each year because they have no insurance. That is almost seven times the number who died in the World Trade Center. Where's the outrage?

These people have a right to basic health care. Yes, cost is a big concern, and I hope that there will be cost-containment included in the bill. There is much waste because people demand services that may not be needed, and doctors are afraid to say no. Many tests are performed unnecessarily because of the fear of malpractice.

President Obama suggests we should work to reduce this threat. We have to be realistic about who should get aggressive care, and when comfort should be the main goal. Hospice care is one way to save money while at the same time providing care and dignity to terminally ill patients.

People are afraid of the government taking over their health care and rationing it. We already have rationing, but it is being done by corporate health insurance companies. Health reform with a public option will be more fair to all.

Contact your senators and ask them to stop playing politics and be compassionate. Please pass health-care reform with a public option.

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