

**Obama Health Care Community Meeting
December 30, 2008 – 7 pm
1700 N. State Street, Bellingham WA 98225**

It was standing room only at our meeting, with 47 people attending to give their input to the health care crisis in our country. They represented a good cross section of our community, ranging from physicians and nurses to college professors, office workers, factory workers, social service workers, teachers, business owners, retired workers, and disabled workers. The most remarkable thing about the meeting was that all these people from different walks of life came to virtually unanimous agreement on what needs to be done to reform our health care system.

The group voted on the following points to forward to the Obama Health Care Reform team, headed by Health and Human Services designee, former Senator Tom Daschle. In addition, included in this report are notes from the considerable discussion on items we did not have time to vote on and a synopsis of the participant surveys.

Item #1:

The biggest problem in the health care system is that health care is mainly paid for by health insurance companies, who make their profits by denying care. The cost of health insurance is too high and 47 million Americans don't have health insurance. People with serious illnesses, who have health insurance, often become bankrupt because the insurance company pays only part of their medical costs.

Item #2

The Federal government needs to control the cost of prescription medicines by such measures as negotiating the prices with pharmaceutical companies, limiting profits, and restricting advertising. This will not limit research as the bulk of pharmaceutical research is now done in

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universities and financed by the federal government.

Item #3

Congress should adopt a single payer, privately delivery medical system such as that of House Resolution 676. This would eliminate the patchwork for profit payment system, but doctors and hospitals would still be private.

Item #4

We have a serious shortage of primary care providers—which includes physicians, nurse practitioners, and other qualified professionals.

This trend could be reversed by providing stipends and loan forgiveness to those who choose primary care.

Medical education is expensive, and hence physicians choose specialties in which they can earn incomes greater than those earned by primary care providers.

Item #5

Health Care and Education should be Human Rights.

Item #6

Employers should not have to provide health care. If employers were freed of the burden of providing health care, U.S. businesses would become more profitable and be able to compete better with other countries which have national universal health care.

Item #7

Cost Control measures need to be adopted. A major factor in controlling

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costs would be to prevent illness through public education and providing regular medical check ups and tests. To do this, increased funding would need to be provided to public health departments

The survey results, with additional comments, are as follows:

1. What do you perceive is the biggest problem in the health system?
 - a. Cost of health insurance **20**
 - b. Cost of health care services **8**
 - c. Difficulty finding health insurance due to a pre-existing condition **4**
 - d. Lack of emphasis on prevention **2**
 - e. Quality of healthcare **3**
 - f. **Additional Comments: problems include lack of coverage, insurance companies, profit motive/current system**
2. What do you think is the best way for policy makers to develop a plan to address the health system problems?
 - a. Community meetings like these **16**
 - b. Traditional town hall meetings **5**
 - c. Surveys that solicit ideas on reform **12**
 - d. A White House Health Care Summit **2**
 - e. Congressional hearings on C-SPAN **5**
 - f. **Additional Comments: Pass HR 676; Administration continue openness, input to Obama administration**
3. After this discussion, what additional input and information would best help you to continue to participate in this great debate?
 - a. More background information on problems in the health system **4**
 - b. More information on solutions for health reform **13**
 - c. More stories on how the system affects real people **2**
 - d. More opportunities to discuss the issues **12**

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- e. **Additional Comments: More facts on lobbying efforts to defeat single payer; hear voices of citizens, not insurance companies.**

Points from the discussion and other written responses which participants submitted at the end of the meeting are listed below:

- Support single payer system, to include all necessary medical needs, including dental and mental health.
- Pass HR 676, a single payer system to expand & improve Medicare for All (several were not familiar with HR 676, or didn't fully understand so I have listed this separately from supporting single payer)
- Employers should not provide health care, but should pay a payroll tax to support national health care
- Better preventative care & public health education – increase funding
- Lack of access is the biggest problem
- For profit insurance companies are a big part of the problem
- Portability is needed for health care (not tied to job or location)
- Lack of available primary care providers needs to be remedied
 - Suggestions to improve:
 - Increase reimbursement to PCP
 - Expand National Health Services scholarship
 - Subsidies for tuition for PCP
- Need to control the price of pharmaceuticals
- Health care must be considered a basic human right
- Need to improve mental health treatment
- Inclusion of alternative medicine
- Need to have dental care covered
- Faster physician reimbursement

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- Better drug & alcohol treatment
- Need to eliminate the influence of health insurance, pharmaceutical lobbyists
- Many insurance companies limit your choice of medical providers, which is a problem especially when changing jobs
- Profits to private insurance companies & drug companies biggest problem
- No cohesive system exists
- Protect against medical bankruptcy
- Medical care should be health-based not disease-based
- Medicare is a good basic program to expand/improve
- Hospitals and other providers not fulfilling obligation to indigent
- A minority of providers cause majority of malpractice problems, these providers should be focused on to improve
- Close the wealth gap
- VA system suffers several problems that need to be addressed.
- Encourage walking
- Stop supporting corn & tobacco
- Eliminate toxins from food, water & soil
- Increase the cigarette tax