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YOUR VIEW: JENNIFER C. JAFF

Health Care: Aren't We Better Than 'What's Best For Me'?



Taped to the frame of my computer monitor is a quotation that helps me, every day, to remember why I am working so hard for the rights of people with chronic illnesses: "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane," said [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

This from a man who knew inequality and injustice when he saw it.

I watch the debates over health insurance reform and wonder. Why is it that we have to pitch its advantages to the people who already have insurance because otherwise, they will oppose reform to help the uninsured? Why is it that seniors are lining up in opposition to reform because they are afraid that — although the draft legislation does not include cuts to [Medicare](#) — they will lose out? Why is it that [President Barack Obama](#) was critiqued for telling faith-based groups that health care reform is our moral responsibility?

When Social Security was passed, and then Medicare, those programs received strong bipartisan support. There was a need. We as a country did not want the elderly and disabled to be without income and health care. We would all make the sacrifice. We decided as a

nation. And we do the same for veterans, whether they saw combat or not. Indeed, we provide free health care for all prisoners, regardless of what they did to land themselves in prison.

So why isn't it enough to say health insurance reform simply is the right thing to do? There are 46 million people in [the United States](#) with no health care. Some of them choose not to buy insurance — they are young, healthy and not thinking about the "what ifs" that we who are older know will become a reality for many of them, especially if you consider that half of all Americans have a chronic health condition.

But many of those without insurance either cannot afford it or have pre-existing conditions that make it impossible to find coverage. Why is it OK to leave them to fend for themselves?

Is this the kind of country we want to be — one that is inhabited by people who make their decisions about what policies and programs are important based solely on what is best for them and them alone?

I talk to people every day who are in agony. They are turned away by insurers because of a pre-existing condition, given pain meds and shown the door by the hospital emergency room; left with nowhere to go, nobody to help them. There are no solutions for them.

They have been left to care for themselves, and they cannot. They are living on the street, in their car or in shelters where they can't sleep for fear of their few meager possessions being stolen by others. No medicine, no doctors, no family, no friends, no support.

If you think it can't happen to you, think again. All it takes is one catastrophic bout of illness and you lose your job, your health insurance, your home — it is happening to people every single day. You could be one of the unlucky ones tomorrow, no matter what your status is today.

But I don't want to have to sell health insurance reform to you by appealing to your self-interest. I want you to think about what America means, who Americans are. I want all of us to recognize that, "of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." And it must stop. Now.

If you care about equality, dignity, community and respect, you must be in favor of health insurance reform.

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