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Healing Health Care

As Grant nears the end of his forty-fifth year old age begins to shed its ominous light over every aspect of his life. He has already watch four of his teeth rot out because, although he works nearly sixty hours a week, he cannot afford basic health care. As he enters the twilight years of his life, earlier than anyone should, he is faced with failing health and no way to pay the doctor bills. The fact that someone who has worked all their life may not be able to obtain adequate medical and dental care because of their station in life goes against all the ideals that have made America great.

As we enter into the twenty-first century we see new cures and treatments springing into our clinics and homes at an unprecedented rate. Only a fool would argue that these advances are not helping millions, but the costs inherent with these new remedies make them inaccessible to many Americans who would benefit greatly from them. From 1971 to 1991 the price of health related goods and services climbed 30 percent faster that of other goods, placing far out of the financial reach of the working class of this nation. It is time to consider a true national health-care system, in order to insure that everyone, not just the wealthy, can enjoy good health. As it stands, America is the only civilized country where access to basic health care depends on where one works and how much one is paid. For many well insured people there is debate about our nation's stance on the separation between the individual and the state, but the fact of the mater is that if our friend Grant had been born five hundred miles to the North he would still have his teeth and a much brighter future.

In Canada, where they have had a national health insurance since 1967, a citizen is guaranteed treatment for any illness that may afflict him or her. In addition to keeping their people heather, and as a result happier, the Canadian system has kept costs minimal while research and development has continued at the same, if not faster, pace that we see here. Around the globe we can see the correlation between national health care systems and better quality of treatment. In Japan, they have countered the medical problems inherent with a crowded society through national health insurance, and as a result enjoy a extremely high quality of living. Even here we have harnessed some of the power of collective medicine, through publicly funded institutions such as the Center for Disease Control and many smaller research projects. These projects, sponsored by state and federal, have yielded many important breakthroughs, yet many Americans cannot afford the technology that they helped to pay for.

And if we continue on the course we have set for ourselves, more people will become medical have-nots. The problem of skyrocketing health costs is already beginning to force many employers to drop many important health benefits from the insurance plans they offer new hires, locking many people into jobs they no longer want for fear of losing benefits. Many small businesses have been forced to stop offering health insurance all together because they cannot afford to pay the bills. The American Hospital Association concluded that between 1995 and 1996 twenty percent of American workers would lose their employment-based insurance, and ten percent of them would lose their retirement coverage. When we add those millions to the millions who never had any health insurance to begin with we can begin to grasp the magnitude of the problem that we must face.

We must also realize that those of us who know that if we became ill we would be cured can never fully comprehend what life would be like without that simple insurance. For the millions who cannot even afford to health care for themselves, let alone their families, the trouble is frighteningly real. And for the millions who are presently insured the problem is about to become much more real unless we

act quickly. That even one person would have to be sick when they could be made well quite easily is a grave injustice, but that millions of hardworking Americans are robbed of proper health care makes a mockery of all of the principles that America has stood for. For a nation, our nation, to say that it stands for ³life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,² and then let its workers toil without hope of an end to their toil is idiotic. The question of national health care is really a test of America's intentions, of whether or not we are willing to sacrifice the good of the many for the good of the few. Let us choose to come together as a nation and beat this thing, so that we may continue to be the model of what a country can be, rather than what a country could have been.