

Yes, Rep. Van Drew, there IS a solution!

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A headline in the Star on December 27 is “Out-of-pocket-pain means skimping on care”. It is from KFF HealthNews, and you already know what it says. We all know. In the rare cases where we or our families or close friends haven’t experienced it ourselves, our newspapers and other media are full of such stories. Every day we read about how people delay or forgo care, get sick, and even die because of costs: co-pays, deductibles, and other surprise charges, all in addition to the premiums they pay, which increase yearly. This is in addition to the other obstacles to care: prior authorization requirements and outright denials of care by insurance companies, and lack of access because of a shortage of health care clinicians.

Does it have to be this way? Is there no way out? Many politicians seem to take the same position as Representative Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ), who said “Other than world peace, honest to God, health care is the toughest issue ever. It is really hard, but I think it behooves us to come up with something.” The last part is true, but not the first. There is a way, not only in theory but one that has been tested and re-tested all over the world. It is the system used by *every* wealthy country, and many with fewer resources: Universal health coverage. Really. It’s true. It is done in different ways, but they all cover everybody, for low, or no, out-of-pocket cost, funded by taxes. They are not all perfect, but the other thing that they have in common is that NO country that has adopted universal health coverage has gone back. Ever.

Could it be done in the US? Sure. The “Medicare for All Acts” (S. 1506 and HR. 3069) would do exactly that, expand the Medicare system to include us all. Everyone. Birth to death. No patchwork system, no falling through the cracks. *Everybody in, nobody out.* Medicare has

served as a single-payer universal health care program for seniors and people with disabilities since 1965, so the structure is there. Just add the rest of us. These bills would also improve Medicare, by covering everything, including mental health, vision, hearing, long-term care, and the full cost of hospitalization (not 80% as now). It’s all good.

But how could we afford it? Wouldn’t taxes go up? They would, for some, but then all these other costs – premiums, co-pays, deductibles, etc. – would go away, and most people would see a net financial benefit, especially those who cost and pay the most – those who are sick. Most of the additional cost of providing healthcare to everyone would be made up for by eliminating insurance company administrative costs and profits. It is thus doubly good; not only does it save money, it creates a system whose goal is providing health care for the American people rather than making profit for insurance and private equity companies. Imagine that! The current US health “non-system” not only costs a lot more per capita than other comparable countries, but leads to worse health outcomes.

So why would the American people not support this? Actually, they do, in poll after poll. A recent one from Data for Progress shows 65% of us do, including about 75% of Democrats and Independents, and about 50% of Republicans! What about politicians? Why are there not more senators and representatives supporting the Medicare for All bills? You can guess, but let’s say that a system designed to make huge profits for insurance and other private companies provides them with the resources and incentives to make large donations to congresspeople; perhaps that’s part of it.

Time for them to hear from us! Sen. Gallego supported Medicare for All when he was in the House, as did the late Rep. Raul Grijalva. Write to our senators, Gallego and Kelly, and our representatives including Rep. Ciscomani, and tell them what you think and demand that they sign onto the Medicare for All bills.

It’s time to have a health system that serves the people!

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