

Who Pays for Health Care?

**A DailyKos.com Diary Entry, a My.BarackObama.com Blog Entry,
And an E-Mail to Progressive Activists**

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The Democratically controlled House of Representatives has just put forth their version of a health care bill—doing away with exclusions for pre-existing conditions, protecting free choice of physicians by patients, and presenting a public option in "healthy competition" with the private plans (which shudder to think how they'll manage to compete against government-run health plans, whose administrative costs are, as in Medicare and Veterans programs, just a fraction of those of for-profit plans). And in keeping with President Obama's call that the program must be paid for, revenue-neutral, the Democrats are proposing to cover most of the cost with a tax surcharge on the wealthiest Americans—families making over a half million a year, about the richest one percent of all American households (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/15/health/policy/15health.html?th&emc=th>).

Remember, the cost of doing nothing is even greater: The current system is broken, delivering worse health outcomes for much more money per capita than in any other industrialized nation; and according to best estimates, the average family of four can expect to pay \$1800 more a year, year after year, to the health insurance companies, if our current, historic efforts at health care reform fail.

Republicans, of course, and some "centrist" Democrats are balking at taxing the rich to pay for health care for all; they are considering alternative plans. Well, if the richest won't be paying the most, guess who will be, however it's legislatively packaged.

Coming into this current economic crisis, we've had the greatest inequality in the distribution of our nation's wealth at any time since the years leading into the Great Depression. That's no coincidence: As long as the lion's share of the economic activity of our country (some 70% of the GDP) is spending by households, particularly middle class households, then the more that the wealth of our nation is concentrated at the top, the poorer our economy at large will be. It's not only unfair but also unwise to keep the middle class, let alone those at the bottom, from getting their fair share of the fruits of their labors.

Likewise, it's not only fair but also wise to tax the most those who profit the most in our economy, in order to pay for the health care system that benefits all of us: A nation cannot be fully productive if its laborers are not as healthy as they can and should be; and even "Harry and Louise," the fictitious middle-class couple from those insurance company-sponsored commercials that helped sink the Clintons'

efforts to reform health care, better be concerned about health care for all—because one day they, too, might become too sick to work or might otherwise lose their job and then lose their health care insurance, even if they can afford to pay the rising premiums and deductibles today.

Congratulations and thanks to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and all the House Democrats for making the "healthy choice." Now it's up to the Senate to follow suit, with of course more input and influence from smaller, typically more conservative states. Just don't let anyone forget that the costs of doing nothing are becoming increasingly unbearable; and the fairer the costs are distributed, the better for our economy as a whole.