

Date: May 13, 2013
To: House Committee on Health Care
From: Main Street Alliance of Oregon
Re: Written Testimony in Support of HB 2922

Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Lee Mercer. I am a small business owner residing in Silverton and a member of the Executive Team of the Main Street Alliance of Oregon. I am speaking in support of HB 2922.

Last June, and seventy years after he landed on Utah Beach in WW II, my 91 year-old father, Marne Mercer, died of cancer.

A year before he had completed his memoirs, *A Proud Narrative About the "Greatest Generation."* In it he describes serving in WW II, raising his family and working in the aerospace industry. It is mostly a cheerful tale of the life of a member of the "greatest generation."

One chapter, however, dealt with darker moments. After retiring, his dreams of travel and relaxation were dashed when, due to questionable medical diagnoses, my mother experienced a breakdown. She suffered for 15 years from a combination of mental dysfunction and seizures.

And for 15 years my dad served as her nurse, cook, and housekeeper. When she finally died, he was bitter about the American medical system. A system which he felt has become so uncoordinated, that doctors are often acting in ways detrimental to their patients' health.

He concluded with a plea for help: *"I think this medical system is crueler than Hitler or any of worst tyrants of history. Our broken medical system must be fixed!"* This chapter was shaped as a letter to President Obama, but he also sent copies to the Surgeon General and Governor John Kitzhaber.

Neither the President nor the Surgeon General replied.

But Governor Kitzhaber did, in a handwritten personal note, which brightened my father's last days. And gave him hope that, indeed, someone was working on changing the status quo in America's health system. Kitzhaber wrote:

"Dear Mr. Mercer,

Thank you for your book and your letter. My late father was also a member of the greatest generation and served in Patton's Army in Europe... He and my mother also wrote to each other almost every day and, like you, he kept the letters which I still have. They are a poignant story of two young Americans and the sacrifice they made."

"I used to call my father up every June 6th on the anniversary of D-day to thank him for saving the world—because that is exactly what your generation did."

"I was also touched by your story about the short-comings of the U.S. medical system. I am deeply committed to reforming our health care system to increase coordination and shift the focus to prevention and wellness. Thank you again for your book."

Warm regards,

John Kitzhaber."

And indeed, Governor Kitzhaber is overseeing bold moves in health care reform. Cover Oregon, the new Oregon health insurance marketplace, is outpacing most of the other states' programs in preparing to take applications for small businesses and uninsured individuals in October.

And, further, he is overseeing the development of Coordinated Care Organizations which will begin moving us from pay-for-service to an outcomes based model where prevention and maintaining health will be incentivized, with projections of decreased health care costs.

But my dad, as a true child of the New Deal era, felt that true universal health care was the final victory needed for health reform in America. Being from the generation that built Social Security, Medicare and America's middle class, he felt that the system would never be complete till we reach a true "everybody in, nobody out" type health care system.

So, in terms of paying the debt Governor Kitzhaber and I owe to our fathers' generation, I'm sure my dad would be glad to know I, and thousands of Oregonians, are asking our legislature to pass the Affordable Health Care for All Oregon Plan, HB 2922. As aging baby boomers, we may be a little late to start paying this debt, but there is no time like the present to start.

Please vote yes on HB 2922.

Thanks for your time and consideration in this matter.

Lee Mercer, Silverton
Executive Team member
Main Street Alliance of Oregon