

Chair Rosenbaum, members of the committee,

April 21, 2015

For the record, I am Michael Huntington of 9083 NW Lessie Place in Corvallis, a retired physician speaking in favor of Senate Joint Resolution 5.

I belong to Physicians for a National Health Program and Health Care for All Oregon, but I do not speak for those organizations. I have no financial interest in the measure under consideration today.

For 32 years I was a radiation oncologist. I helped people through their battles with cancer and used the latest in technology to control their diseases. But in the last decade of my career (1996-2006) I saw increasing numbers of patients coming to us with advanced cancers. They had suffered symptoms but avoided medical care for months or years because they could not afford insurance or health care.

I knew this was occurring everywhere in our state and our nation. I learned that most other developed countries did not let this happen to their people. The voters and their leaders in other countries seemed to understand that if they were to have a happy, healthy, educated, productive society they had to make sure their people had good health care and healthy living conditions.

A Gallup poll this year revealed that fear of costs causes one third of Americans to avoid medical care whether they have "health care insurance" or not. When people can't get care, they get sicker; each year at least 45,000 of them die. The Commonwealth Fund in 2008 showed that the US did the worst of 19 nations at preventing deaths from treatable illness. An estimated 40 Oregonians die each month because they have no access to healthcare.

One third of Americans cannot pay their medical bills whether they have insurance or not. Each month an estimated 775 Oregonians file for bankruptcy induced by health care costs.

Our healthcare costs are inexplicably and unconscionably high. The high cost is the prime reason for poor access to care for at least a third of our population.

70% of costs are generated by the highest 10% risk group of people. Survival in the market of selling health care insurance or health care services requires very good orchardists. They must know how to cherry pick and lemon drop, i.e., avoid the 10%.

But Oregon will thrive best when it guarantees better care for more people at lower cost. Oregon cannot thrive or be healthy if its insurance system is preoccupied with avoiding people who might get sick and if its market system of health care makes health care unaffordable and inaccessible.

One of the reasons our health care system remains mired in the incentives to overprice health care and exclude and harm so many Oregonians is that it's much easier for wealthy candidates, including those who profit most from our health care system, to be elected to office and legislatively preserve and worsen these incentives. Campaign contribution limits would allow more candidates of middle and lower income to be elected and act on behalf of the thousands of Oregonians who suffer under the effects of our current health care system.