

TESTIMONY TO JOINT TASK FORCE on UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE
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Would that I could influence you to serve the citizens of Oregon and provide them with what is within in your power: the evidence that health care as we now know and experience it is in need of significant if not monumental change.

It is the human condition (actually mentally hard-wired) to continue to do what we have always done. We are afraid of change. We are afraid of innovation. We seek not to be blamed if one of our ideas fails even though failing historically has often been the impetus for change and major improvement.

As an immigrant who arrived legally at the age of three I have been subjected to the: “go back to your own country”, “y’all should learn to work” and other unpleasanties. I never bothered to tell people that I came because of a divorce. That in my home country we were leaders, intellectuals and professionals. Why discuss or argue? Most people don't listen.

As an immigrant I could see the USA from the “inside and the outside”. Lucky me! I knew and experienced that the USA was a model to the world in leadership, democracy, education, technology, health care, and planning for the future. It did not matter whether politically or philosophically a country agreed with the USA. The USA was a the model in most fields. As we know some admiration was deserved and some was not. The USA was less than perfect but perfect is what you strive for not what you expect to achieve.

The USA has historically been caught up in issues of racism, inequities, homophobia, fear of the “others”/immigrants/migrants. Imperfect but striving.

I purposely have lived in Oregon because I believe change has been and is possible in Oregon. We strive to protect our environment, our economy, our citizens. We often succeed and must again.

Three stories are critical to my understanding of health care. I am retired and live with the comforts that my profession and age provide for me. I am in rare and extraordinarily good health. Professionally I have seen the opposite.

As a graduate student at Emory I became aware of the health conditions of Blacks in Georgia. I was appalled! I worked in Public Health in Oregon and saw the dire needs of so many. The health care system as we know it is broken and by definition was so from the start. We must be willing to do what has never been done before in ways that are new

and far-reaching. This pandemic if nothing else has taught us that if a population in our society is unwell and suffering so are we all!

My best friend, Marguerite, went to hear her opera-singer daughter perform in Vienna. Happy days! A lifetime achievement! Her daughter had a contract with the opera company! During Marguerite's visit she suffered a heart attack! She was rushed to the hospital. The care was excellent. Were they giving such excellent care to impress a foreigner? No, it was routine care! Marguerite was hospitalized for several days and sent home for follow up. Her primary health care provider was impressed by the quality of care she received. Marguerite, however, was overwhelmed by the fact that the care was routine and cost free. She paid nothing for the care she received! Marguerite could not believe that she didn't have to sell her home to cover the cost, that the care was considered premium quality and that it was free. Life went on without trauma.

My cousin, Maritza, went to the UK to visit her daughter in graduate school and see the country. Happy days! Unfortunately, Maritza took seriously ill. She was rushed to the hospital where they saved her life with surgery and treatment. We were all horrified imagining the bill. Unaccustomed to UK health care we were stunned that all had been done at no cost to the patient or her health insurance. Life went on without trauma.

My brother, Simon, a well-known painter in what was known as the Washington School became ill. Due to his employment as a professor he had health insurance. He was treated and was well on the road to recovery. I was with him for days and back to normal was imminent. A bill for greater than \$50,000 arrived. I spoke at length to my 57 year old brother and assured him that his recovery was all that mattered. This event occurred more than 20 years ago. Then, \$50,000 dollars was almost the price of a modest home. My brother insisted that he would never recover financially. I stayed by his side insisting that something could be done. He was a well known artist. He was gifted and talented. He was a hard worker. He was an inspiration to his student. He was an outstanding citizen at every level. Overwhelmed by the cost of saving his life and his inability to recover, my brother took his own life. Life has NEVER ceased to be a trauma for all who knew him.

What you are being asked to do as a Task Force is to see the future with the global evidence before you. If government is tasked to care for those who need, it is tasked to care for all of us. I'm asking you to see in new ways, to care at a granular level for a society whose response to health care needs has proven inadequate and biased when keeping to the ways of thinking in the past. The idea of fixing it later has never worked! What is needed is a response considering issues that were historically ignored and hidden in the past.

Thank you for your kind attention to my concerns.