

Dear Oregon Legislature, it was only because of the Oregon Health Care Plan that I am successful Instructor today. My story is hard for me to talk about. I would rather not remember it, but for the others who suffer simply because they are poor, I will. I grew up in the military. My father served in Vietnam so one would think I would have had some way to access medical insurance but at 18 I had none as I was no longer a Dependent.

I was one of the first recognized antibiotic resistant people in the state of Oregon in 1981 when I was hospitalized near death at the age of 18.

I suffered terribly from repeated infections that endangered my life with no health insurance. It was a devastating way to start my adult life, although at the time, I knew I was lucky to even be alive, but with an \$8,000 medical bill in 1981. It took me until 1986 to pay off the bill to Sacred Heart hospital. I was told by doctors in Eugene to prepare my parents for my early death and never have children. Luckily, the doctors were wrong; none of the infections did kill me, but often I suffered so terribly, I wished they would.

The many surgeries and medical bills starting piling up at the age of 18 left me impoverished and also, facially disfigured. The only work I could find was in the back of a restaurant as a dishwasher, where no one could see me. I knew I was lucky to have it.

This first \$8,000 bill in 1981 would be \$22,099.61 in 2018 dollars. However, this bill was only the first, as doctors fought my infections with the only option of repeated surgeries.

It was not until I was a part of the Oregon Health Plan in the early 1990s that my life dramatically and finally, improved because I could afford regular medical care to prevent the infections by building up my immunity with naturalistic methods and care. Because of access to the Oregon Health Plan my health eventually stabilized. In addition, a plastic surgeon who helped disfigured children in Mexico, Dr. Jensen, of Medford, an angel, donated almost all of his help to me because I was so pitiful. With great effort, he repaired much of the problem with my face, leaving only slight and barely noticeable scarring.

I could start to climb out of poverty when I was physically more presentable and my income no longer was dominated by health related bills.

I am 55 now and one of the courses I teach is the History of Medicine. Anyone can see the story of the privatization of medical care for profit is one of the saddest and unwise choices and turns of American society. Equal access to health care would make reparations instantaneous, from atomic veterans who

are denied care by the VA to the descendants of African American slaves who built this nation with their blood and the Native Americans who had their land taken from them.

Today, I have a beautiful son and daughter in law. I am one of the lucky ones. We need a well thought out plan for a universal Health Plan like SB 770 to cover everyone. I live each day knowing I was supposed to die and how lucky I was instead; so every day when I see the growing number of homeless, who are mostly ill and struggling, I know they are me.

I suffer for all the people who are sick today and people who already died because they could not get health care. Please repair our broken system and continue the leadership of Oregon for a better world. A single payer plan that is simple and universal will be an investment that repairs many problems with one simple action: recognizing health care as not only a human right, but good and life enhancing for all of us. As pandemics loom, the rich will be exposed as easily as the poor. We will all feel better, inside and out, when we reach out to help each of us be the healthiest we can be.

We have a responsibility to create a better world and leave Oregon even stronger than how we found it.
Thank you, Dr. Linda Marie Richards