

Submitter: Benjamin Ben-Baruch
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure: SB1089

We all know that the US has the absolute worst health care system of any industrialized nation. At the present time it is dominated by financial corporations. They call themselves "health care companies" but they are insurance companies, not health care providers. In Oregon, we decided to do something about this horrible state of affairs and we declared health care to be a human right. We, the people, have spoken. Now it is the responsibility of the legislature to give practical meaning to this human right and to act in accordance with the voters' decision.

For several years I lived in a small country with decent medical care but it was not up to the standards of the US or Europe. I was classified as a resident and was entitled to complete medical care because this country had (virtually) universal health care. At one point I needed to be hospitalized. I walked into the hospital. I was seen very quickly -- perhaps because I was vomiting on their floor. The only questions they asked had to do with my health and my condition at the time. I was treated and released, given instructions for follow-up, and not billed.

After returning to the states I spent six months working in England. I had an accident and needed emergency care. I walked into a clinic and received the care I needed without delay. And I was not billed. And while I was in England I had many conversations about the differences in medical care in England and the US. I learned that in Britain doctors could write a prescription for social services. If someone just needed a little help and did not have to be in the hospital or other facility, they received social services as part of their medical care. And I noticed that in all of my discussions about medical care the Brits had the same complaints about their National Health Service as one hears in the US from sources like the AMA -- but there was complete consensus that they much preferred having their problems to having a system that could deny someone needed care or that could bankrupt someone who received expensive care.

A few years later when I was back in the states, I needed major surgery. The surgery was postponed because my employer and insurance company refused to authorize my coverage. But the doctors [pl. sic.] said that I could not wait any longer. They operated before I knew whether it would be covered. Fortunately my union intervened and made sure that my surgery was paid for.

I have been lucky so far. When I needed expensive care I was either in a country that had universal health care or I was lucky enough to have had a union go to bat for me with the hospital and insurance company.

Most countries have better health care systems than we do -- and the overall costs are cheaper. My experience has been that living in a place with universal health care is better than having to worry about whether I will have to choose between needed health care and bankruptcy