

Letter to Editor/To our Congressional Representatives and Senators

Health care reform is imperative for the health of our nation. Over seventy percent of United States citizens are in favor of reforming our health care system...and no wonder.

The League of Women Voters of Bellingham/Whatcom County has just spent 6 months studying health plans around the world. We compared the health systems of Japan, France, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Switzerland and Australia to our health care model.

It was shocking to learn that although we spend more per capita than any of these countries (\$6102 per capita vs. France, for instance, which spends \$3159 per capita), the U.S. rates dead last when it comes to life expectancy and infant mortality.

Worst of all, 47 million of our citizens have no health care insurance and increasing numbers of Americans are finding insurance costs prohibitive and too easily cancelled when a major illness occurs.

Now that several reform plans are being considered by Congressional committees, the League of Women Voters, both nationally and locally, urge you as a citizen and health care consumer to carefully study the plans. We must convey the urgency of this debate to our elected representatives.

Millions of dollars are being spent daily to sway your opinion. Sound bites do not portray the true picture. This is our health care and all of us should be taking an active interest in the facts and proposals. (A side by side review of the current proposed bills is available at <http://KFF.org/healthreform/sidebyside.cfm>)

The League of Women Voters supports the following:

1. **Quality, affordable health care for all U.S. residents.** Many decry the cost of universal health care, yet the goal of affordable universal care has been met in most other first world nations. When questioned, citizens of these countries are appalled that under our system the privileged have excellent coverage but so many go without. Universal coverage will determine the humanity of our system.
2. **Reduced costs for individuals and businesses.** A huge percentage of personal bankruptcies are caused by unexpected medical costs. Without help paying for the enormous burden of health care costs, our companies and industries cannot compete on a level playing field with the international community. We have just seen how huge medical costs have contributed to the demise of the auto industry.
3. **A public option.** A privately delivered but publicly financed option would keep all insurance costs in line by reducing overhead and using bargaining power with medical providers for the best prices. At present our overhead costs are nearly double that of other first world countries. Our study learned that our administrative costs are \$464 per person vs the next country in our study—France at \$238. A public option will also force insurance companies into more competitive practices.

We hope you will join the League, the AMA, AARP, Physicians for National Health Care, the National Nurses Association, Wal-Mart, Target, and many other alliances representing millions of our citizens, who support health care reform and are working to make it a reality.

It is imperative that Congress takes action to pass real health care reform in the next few months.