

~ HEALTHCARE ~

Healthcare, especially for mothers and children, is a high priority. Everyone should have access to good, affordable healthcare. Right now, that is not the case for many people in South Dakota. A lot of people in our state live in areas where they have to travel a great distance (50 miles or more) just to see a doctor. This is made worse by poverty rates and the relatively high cost of transportation. Our winter weather can make this even more of a problem for many people.

In addition, there is an ongoing shortage of doctors and other healthcare practitioners (physician assistants and nurse practitioners) especially in primary care and in many specialty areas. For example, the only children's hospitals are located in Sioux Falls. And a large part of the state lacks any psychiatric services despite the rising rates of suicide in South Dakota.

Maternal and infant health are also a serious problem. Infant mortality in South Dakota is 6.86 deaths per 100 births. There are only 5 other states in the entire country that have a worse infant mortality rate than our state. This may be partly because only about 33% of pregnant women get any meaningful prenatal and perinatal care.

In South Dakota, about 10.2% of people are uninsured. This means that more than half the other states have better rates of health insurance coverage than we do. When people have no health insurance, they are much less likely to get health care and get essentially no preventive care. Many of those without insurance are among the poorest and the youngest.

Another measure of worsening care of people having babies is the rate of serious illness and complications during pregnancy or within a short time of delivery. These serious complications have risen almost 200% since 1993. This includes cases where mothers had to have blood transfusion or be placed on a ventilator or have emergency hysterectomy as well as other less common complications. This is aggravated by laws that put the government between a doctor and patient in the most private and personal decisions that a woman can make.

Government has no business making medical decisions, but it does have a responsibility to see to it that healthcare is accessible to all people. We must surely see that we need to do a better job of caring for people during pregnancy and childbirth as well as caring for the children once they are born.

The cost of healthcare is a serious concern of just about everybody. We are spending in America an average of about \$12,500 per person per year on healthcare. While this is going on, pharmaceutical companies and many large healthcare corporations are making enormous amounts of money. An example of this is the cost of insulin. This has risen over 50% since 2014. For many lower income people, this results in avoiding the use of insulin which can have deadly consequences.

When given an opportunity to cap the price of insulin at \$35 per month, John Thune and the GOP voted against it. John Thune has accepted political campaign money from the big pharmaceutical companies; this tells you where his priorities lie. Once again the well being of the average citizen is harmed by partisan politics. There must be ways of reducing healthcare costs for the average person.

The pharmaceutical industry also profits from you by using research that your tax dollars have paid for. A study supported by the Institute for New Economic Thinking examined public sector investment by the National Institutes for Health (NIH) that contributed to the development of new drugs approved by the FDA between 2000 and 2019. This study analyzed data on the approval of 356 new drugs and examined 2.2 million research papers. This revealed that about \$230 billion (or about 40% of the NIH budget) went to help develop these 356 new drugs that were approved by the FDA.

During an overlapping period from 2000 to 2018 the 35 biggest pharmaceutical companies made about \$1.9 trillion net earnings. That is how much they had left over after they paid all their employees, all their expenses, all their bonuses to executives and everything else. In case you are not completely clear on these numbers, a trillion is a thousand billion. This is a form of corporate welfare.

\$230 billion in research costs are given by you, the taxpayer, to the pharmaceutical industry to develop drugs from which they earn trillions of dollars. This is part of the reason they can afford to buy all those TV commercials. By the way, the cost of all those TV ads is part of the health care costs that you pay for every year. Since we are paying for some of the research that the pharmaceutical companies use to make those huge profits, we should be getting prescription medications that are priced a little above cost. John Thune takes donations from the pharmaceutical companies; he is supporting this exploitation.

The high cost of medical care and inadequate insurance coverage has resulted in crushing levels of medical debt in our nation. An article in the American Journal of Medicine, a highly respected peer reviewed medical journal, in 2007 found that 62.1% of bankruptcies in the US were primarily associated with medical debt. After the Affordable Care Act was passed (“Obamacare”) this issue was re-evaluated in a more limited study in the same journal in 2011. They found that medical bankruptcies had not significantly decreased in spite of the fact that in 3/4 of these bankruptcies, the people had health insurance. Obviously the present health insurance system is not protecting people from catastrophic financial loss due to illness.

Many medical institutions like Sanford and Avera not only supply your medical needs but also are your an insurer. Both hospitals will not take each others insurance. This limits your choices in selecting a provider. It interferes with interstate commerce and reduces competition.

There is another problem with our healthcare system. There is a bureaucracy that is present in the room whenever you are seeing your doctor. It is not only the government that I am talking about; it is private health insurers. Your doctor can recommend a test or a medicine and then tell you that you have to wait for the insurance to authorize it.

They expect us to believe that the insurance company is better qualified than your doctor who spent 24 years in school and training to diagnose and treat you; your doctor knows you and has examined you. This is clearly an intrusion into your private life that removes your liberty to make private decisions about your healthcare. Neither the government nor a private corporation has the right to intrude on the relationship between you and your doctor.

In the early 1980's there was a strong push to change our healthcare system over to a business and profit oriented model that was supposed to rely on market forces to control costs and spending. The problem with this is that the consumer of healthcare never really knows what the cost is until after the fact, and the one using the service is not the one making the financial decision. In our system the normal forces of supply and demand don't work. You as the patient never know what you are buying or how much it costs and you have no way of knowing if someone else is selling for a better price.

This is one of the main reasons that the cost of medical care has risen far faster than the rate of inflation in recent decades. A significant portion of the dollars that should be going to provide healthcare are instead creating increased profit margins for health insurers, hospital systems, and pharmaceutical companies for things like almost non-stop commercials on TV for expensive drugs. It is not the doctors and other healthcare providers that are getting rich off this system. They are paid only a fraction of the fee that you are charged. Most of them are just employees of one of the healthcare systems that control the provision of healthcare in your community.

In South Dakota just a few large organizations control most of the hospitals and medical practices in the state. Doctors who want to opt out of this system and deal with you directly face an uphill battle. Clearly your health and well being are not the top priorities of this system.

This is a liberty issue. Our Right to Life is threatened when others control our ability to get medical care and interfere with the medical decision between us and our doctors. Tripartisan legislative effort is one of the few ways to achieve control over our liberty in the area of healthcare. Clearly the current system has failed.

~ Send a Libertarian message to our national government. Restore your right to make your own medical decisions along with your doctor. We want our Senators to drop the partisan politics and get to work solving the people's problems. We want Senators who will work for you and not the big corporations of the healthcare industry. ~

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