

Point of View

To Be Equal

Federal Health Plan Due

The American health care delivery system is beginning to break down and we're seeing revived interest in some form of national health



John E. Jacob

insurance. It won't come tomorrow, or even the day after, but support is building for radical changes in the present system.

The driving force behind calls for a national health plan is runaway costs. Business, which used to be firmly in the camp of those opposing greater government involvement, now sees a national health plan as a key element in staying competitive.

Chrysler's chairman, Lee Iacocca, says over \$700 of the cost of producing a car in the U.S. goes to pay for employees' and retirees' health care. But he and other business people have to compete against foreign firms whose health care costs are a fraction of ours, thanks to some of national health insurance.

Opponents have always pointed to the excellence of our health care system as an argument to avoid tinkering with it.

But while our system does provide world-class technology, research and care for the affluent, it fails miserably to provide quality care for the poor and the uninsured.

Medicaid is supposed to meet the health care needs of the poor, but it doesn't. Throughout the decade, Medicaid eligibility has been tightened to the point where

less than two out of five poor families and children are covered. Just a decade ago, almost two-thirds of the poor were covered.

As a result we're seeing a health crisis in the African American community and in poor urban and rural areas. The already intolerable gap

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between blacks and whites in health has widened.

Throughout the century the difference in black-white life expectancy was slowly narrowing, but in the past three years that's been reversed and the gap is growing.

A white child born in 1987 has a life expectancy of 75.6 years; a black child, only 69.4 years. And a big part of the reason for that gap is lack of access to health care.

Poor people can't afford to see a doctor except in emergencies, and then the first source of help is the emergency room of the local hospital -- a recourse that's overloaded public hospitals, and does not deliver quality care to the poor.

Most Americans have health insurance, they buy privately or get as a fringe benefit of their job. But that coverage is unavailable to the unemployed and most of the poor.

It's estimated that 37 million Americans have no health insurance coverage. A recent public opinion poll found that some 17 million people couldn't get medical attention when they needed it last year because of financial reasons.

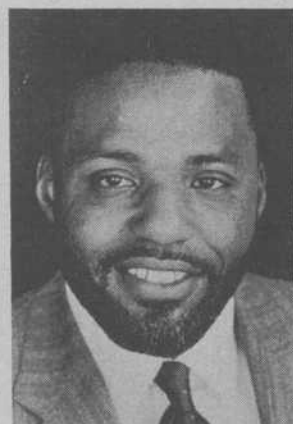
There's got to be a better way. Just over the border, Canada has a national health insurance system that seems to be working. They spend proportionately about half what we do not health care and polls show Canadians are more satisfied with the

Political Points

By

Assemblyman

Wendell P. Williams



What In The Hell Is The Gun For?

The year was 1966, a young 27 year old singer by the name of James Brown experienced his first big smash hit titled "Please, Please, Please." I was a 16 year old high school sophomore attending a particular New Orleans High School for the very first time. Like most predominantly African-American High Schools in the deep South during those years, the teachers had total liberty in methods of discipline. It was very common to hear teachers threaten to do anything from ripping off arms to bouncing students off walls to assure that they learned a particular lesson. One teacher, Joe Marrow had the reputation of scaring students even in their sleep. There was not a student around who didn't fear for his life when Mr. Marrow called his name. Mr. Marrow never experienced discipline problems-Never.

I'll never forget one breezy morning in March when we arrived at school and found that Mr. Marrow was absent from school. It felt like Christmas morning, what a happy, happy relief knowing that we would have a day free of being scared out of our skin. Then something very strange happened. One student opened Mr. Marrow's desk drawer and to everyone's surprise there was a big, big loaded pistol that looked as if it would jump out and bite. The first thing that I thought of was, No one in their right mind would stand up to Mr. Marrow, so "What In The Hell Is The Gun For?"

The way that I felt when I saw that gun was a feeling I never really felt again until last Sunday when I found out that the ousted Executive Director of the Housing Authority of Las Vegas was secretly issued a Baretta 9mm pistol. The handgun was purchased last Spring at public expense for approximately \$1,000.

Dale Hambleton, the number 2 man at the Housing Authority, was also secretly issued the same type pistol, even though there is nothing in their job descriptions to show a need for weapons. Hambleton, by the way, is Sartini's first cousin.

Acting Executive Director, Gus Ramos, Jr., said that he could not explain why Sartini needed a gun, just as no one could explain why Mr. Marrow needed a gun either. The two just don't add up. Mr. Marrow, a tough man working with well-mannered 16 year olds and Mr. Sartini working with low-income and Senior Citizens. At least Mr. Marrow's gun was not paid for at tax payers' expense.

Finally, there is another cloud of suspicion surrounding this insult. There is no record that Commissioners approved the decision to allow Sartini and his cousin to carry weapons, especially guns purchased with public money. With poor people and Senior Citizens experiencing rent overcharges, unjust appliance charges and other setbacks have left most tenants basically helpless and in despair. So Mr. Sartini, "Please, Please, Please", What In The Hell Is The Gun For?

View Point: "The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still small voice within me."

Mahatma Gandhi

care they're getting than Canadian system. Americans are.

In another poll this year only ten percent of Americans said they were satisfied with our system and a majority said they preferred reforms along the lines of the

Investing In The Health Of Our Nation

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census the gap between the rich and poor in our nation has increased over the last decade. This inequity is further manifested by persons who live in substandard and violent living environments; have inadequate access to health care; and poor educational or employment skills to break out of their despair. The tragedy is that this human neglect continues worldwide, in both developed and developing countries.

In the global community, social welfare has been neglected at the expense of weapons as world military expenditures continue to grow at record levels. An interesting and probing book entitled "World Military and Social Expenditures", by Ruth Sivard, provides an eyeopening account of how many nations neglect the welfare of their citizens. As we review our own budgetary priorities in this nation -- the worldwide data from this book should help all of us reflect and consider what our commitment to social welfare should be at home. For example:

*The chances of dying from social neglect (malnutrition and preventable disease) are 33 times greater than the chances of dying in war.

*The U.S. and U.S.S.R., first in the world in military power, rank 17th and 45th among all nations in their infant mortality rates.

*Six times as much public research money goes for research on weapons as for research on health protection.

*Every minute 15 children in the world die for want of essential food and inexpensive vaccines, and every minute the world's military machine takes another \$1,900,000 from the public treasury.

Everyone recognizes the need for a sound national defense. But we must keep things in proper perspective. Perhaps President Eisenhower, a military professional, said it best when he stated, "The problem in defense is how far you can go without destroying from within what you are trying to defend from without."

Destroying from within. These are haunting words to think about. However, this is precisely what our nation is doing when we fail to invest in programs which improve educational opportunity for poor children, or provide affordable health care and decent housing. In past news columns, I have harped on the issue about the need to invest in the Women's Infant and Children (WIC) program, Head Start and other cost effective programs. We need to invest to the level where every woman and child who are eligible for these programs receive these vital services.

I am tired hearing about individuals who play politics with children, profess to be on the vanguard for their well-being, and then don't follow through by not supporting funding increases in good programs with proven track records. It is simply hypocrisy in the extreme. During his candidacy, President Bush spoke proudly of his support for Head Start. He went on to get dubbed as the "Education President." But where is the follow through? The President's budget for education does not adequately address our national needs. His recent education summit was simply a trumped up public relations event, rather than a substantive examination and commitment to school improvement. The President's Secretary of Education, Lauro F. Cavazos, is currently arranging regional conferences across the nation to promote an educational scheme called "CHOICE" which has absolutely nothing to do with his responsibility of promoting federal education programs.

Not only are we at educational risk, but our citizen's health is at risk. We sometimes forget that there are 37 million Americans who have no health insurance. Infant mortality, AIDS, and other health problems are plaguing our communities. The health of our nation requires a greater focus and priority in our national budget. We have enough "guns". What we now need is a lot more "butter" in order to prevent further social neglect of America's citizens.