

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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The Issue at Hand

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It seems that we get more news reports on the process of the health care debate than on the issue at hand. Have you been as confused by all the media hype about the voting processes that Congress uses as I have? The media is doing little to help the American people understand what is going on! I hope that is not their intent. If it is, I would be very disappointed in the free press and in our elected leaders' ability to govern.

For the record, both budget reconciliation and "deem and pass" processes have been used by Congress for decades; they are not new inventions by this Congress. Budget reconciliation has been around since 1974 and used numerous times by both parties to reach an outcome and prevent endless filibusters. "Deem and pass" was used the first time in 1933 and used 85 times by both Republican and Democrat controlled Congresses. Both processes are entirely constitutional. Don't be fooled by loud voices saying otherwise.

The issue at hand is health care reform. It has been a long, long debate, and the American people need an answer to this terrible situation that is evidenced in story after story of human suffering. We hear that health care will cost too much money. On March 18, 2010, the Congressional Budget Office determined that the health reform plan will cost \$940 billion over 10 years; however, it will trim the federal deficit by \$130 billion in the first ten years and \$1.2 trillion in the second ten years. Sounds like a savings to me, not too high a cost.

Over 47 million (one in six) people and over nine million children are without health coverage and 25 million more are under-insured. The number of Americans going without or delaying needed medical care increased sharply since 2003. Eighteen-thousand people in the United States die every year from a lack of health insurance, two people every hour. These numbers make me feel ashamed. Ashamed that we are not providing health care to at least all of our

children. Ashamed that we are not caring for the needs of all our elders. Ashamed that we are turning people away when they need us the most; when they are seriously ill and have to make choices between medicine and food. The cost to human life is too high to do nothing.

Health care is not only a basic human right but a human need. It is a moral imperative to transform healthcare so that it is inclusive, accessible, affordable and accountable. We have a responsibility to work on the issue at hand. That issue is the creation of a national health care system that affirms the moral and justice imperatives of equal access for all people not just those who can afford it.

Where political and market-driven forces have failed, we the people must proclaim that health care for all is the mark of a just and compassionate society. We have the power to change the conversation and envision a society where each person is afforded health, wholeness, and human dignity. That is the issue at hand.

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