

# The Dallas Post

## EDITORIALS

### True reform of health care must cover all, cost less

Catastrophic illness can strike anyone, at any time. But the effect it has on a family whose member is struck ill varies dramatically, especially when measured in financial terms.

As the Clinton administration prepares to make good on its promise to reform America's health care system (or health care chaos, depending on your perspective), these principles should be high on the agenda.

Every American should have easy and affordable access to basic health care, both to prevent and to treat illness. This principle is so straightforward that it's embarrassing that it even must be mentioned. But the fact is that in the United States in 1993, millions of citizens are unable to get a checkup or test that might find an ailment in its early stages. Instead, they must wait until they are noticeably sick before seeking assistance. This holds true for many people with insurance as well as nearly all without it.

A dime of prevention is worth a dollar of cure. Again, you would think this obvious truth would be self-evident, but it isn't to many of the players who benefit from others' misfortune. The cost of illness in lost school and work performance is huge and unmeasured, but anyone who cares to think about it objectively knows how much the distraction of illness takes from the important pursuits of daily living.

If rationing is necessary, it should be based on need, not on ability to pay. The tactics that were used to attack health care reform during the Presidential campaign were shameful and dishonest. Health care is more rationed in the United States than in any other advanced nation; it's just that the measure is one's pocketbook or insurance policy, not need. That's not to say that people who can afford it shouldn't be able to buy more advanced testing or treatment, only that adequate basic care must be made available to everyone.

Providing good basic care to everyone shouldn't cost any more than our present wasteful system. A much larger share of America's total economy is now devoted to paying for health care than in any other nation. Yet, more than 30 million of our fellow citizens are without adequate care. It would be unconscionable to further burden individuals and businesses in order to provide basic care to everyone. Any increased costs must be balanced against savings, *within the health care system*. As reforms work their way through the system, the overall cost of care must shrink as a percentage of our national economy.

In addition to changing the way we pay for health services, we must change the way we use them. It is imperative that we promote preventive care, especially to those individuals most at risk such as pregnant women and small children. Neighborhood clinics staffed by family doctors must be established and publicized.

Doctors must be freed from the notion that protecting themselves from liability is more important than prescribing sensible care. Fear of malpractice lawsuits is a real contributor to high costs, and a limit must be placed on both the frequency and size of suits.

Long-term care must be part of the plan. If it's not, the aging of America's population will bankrupt us one family at a time, as more people are forced to give up productive employment to care for aging family members.

It is instructive to note that the present crisis in health care reached its peak during the supposedly flush years of the 1980's. Certainly there were shortcomings in prior decades, but they became gaping inequalities as more and more physicians moved into high-paying specialties at the same time that escalating insurance rates forced employers to cut back or drop group insurance coverage.

In the long run, a single-payer system like that in Canada appears to be the only way to truly control health care costs without sacrificing access for some of our citizens. But it's unlikely that such a plan could be adopted in the present political climate, so "managed competition," which some call the Insurance Company Protection Plan, stands the best chance of approval. As long as whatever comes out of Hillary Clinton's working group addresses the principles above, it will be a first step in the right direction.

### Do you agree? Disagree?

Editorials are the opinion of the management of The Dallas Post. We welcome your opinion on contemporary issues in the form of letters to the editor. If you don't write, the community may never hear a contrasting point of view. Send letters to: The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612. Please include your name, address and a daytime phone number so that we may verify authenticity. We do not publish anonymous letters, but will consider withholding the name in exceptional circumstances. We reserve the right to edit for length and grammar.



Stonehenge in Falls

Photo by Ron Bartizek

### Letters

### Reader questions Women's Network Pathfinder Award

Editor:  
Re: Award article in The Dallas Post, February 24, 1993.

The Wyoming Valley Women's Network is seeking nominees for the 1993 Pathfinder Award. Awards are great and the role of women outside the home certainly deserve recognition.

However, the weakest link in the society today is found in the disintegration of the family. The term family is not defined by government but by reality. Maybe the

reason God gave woman the role of mother was that it was and still is the greatest challenge. As a man I appreciate a woman outside the role of mother, but I know that it will take a woman to save what is left and rebuild America's Families.

Your award is tainted when you give an award to a coordinator for NOW. Their pro-homosexual and unrestricted abortion

stance is one of the greatest attacks on the family and traditional values. The other award recipients may be worthy of honor, but let us remember that a woman's greatest award is to see her children succeed morally and economically in a beautiful America.

Having all the great positions outside of the home filled by women is meaningless if we lose

the battle to crime, alcohol, drugs, homosexuality, pornography and other areas that show disrespect for life. The greatest battle of all time is being waged today within the home and woman will determine if America survives or joins the trash heap of civilization.

My hat is off to mothers everywhere.

Bob Bachman  
Sweet Valley

### Guest Opinion

### A stronger state D.U.I. law would save lives

By COL. GLENN A. WALP,  
Commissioner of the  
Pennsylvania State Police

In society's life and death battle against the tragedy of impaired driving, the tide is clearly turning.

There was a time when drunk driving was tolerated as a somewhat acceptable and amusing vice. Hollywood type-cast lovable bumbling drunks blazing down the highways on a wing and a prayer. Drunk driving was presented as a daring recklessness, a glaring symbol of nonconformity.

No one dared "insult" a person by telling them when they had too much, or that they were incapable of driving home safely. Our young people tragically embraced drinking and driving as a symbol of adulthood and maturity. Punishment for drunk driving varied from court room to court room and case to case.

"There but for the grace of God go I," perhaps best summed up society's attitude that made it possible for drunk drivers to turn our highways into virtual minefields of death and carnage.

Finally, at the height of all the madness, we began to examine the real-life consequences of drunk driving. We began to focus on drunk driving through the eyes of grieving families whose loved ones died because they had the misfortune of being on the same highway as a drunk driver.

Times have changed. We no longer find it conscionable to let friends drive drunk. It's no longer tolerable to be impaired and driving. Drunk driving is finally being seen as the senseless, thoughtless and deadly crime it is. This new attitude is already paying dividends.

Since 1981, the number of Pennsylvanians killed annually in alcohol-related accidents has

declined from 943 to 681. The U.S. Department of Transportation reports that highway fatalities last year fell below 40,000 for the first time in three decades. Further, the percentage of alcohol related highway deaths in the U.S. was nearly 12 percent less in 1992 than it was in 1982.

Much of this success can be directly attributed to education, tougher drunk driving laws, high profile public awareness campaigns and aggressive law enforcement. Even though we have made major strides in combating drunk driving, much remains to be done. I believe society's diminishing tolerance for drunk driving has reached the point where there is ample support to further strengthen our Driving Under the Influence (DUI) laws - ultimately saving more lives and preventing injuries.

I recommend four changes in Pennsylvania's drunk driving law.

1) Decrease the legally allowable Per Se Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) level from .10 to .08 percent.

Research indicates that many drivers are impaired at low blood alcohol levels. Some research indicates that such impairment starts as low as .015 percent. According to the National Safety Council, impairments for most individuals occurs at .05 percent and that all drivers have their driving performance significantly impaired at .08 BAC.

Lowering the BAC level to .08 percent would more accurately reflect the level at which all drivers' skills are compromised. To date, five states (California, Maine, Oregon, Utah and Vermont) have .08 BAC limits.

In California, which also enacted an Administrative License Revocation law, alcohol-related fatalities declined by 14 percent

and alcohol-related injuries decreased by 12 percent. A survey of 1,600 California drivers disclosed that eight of 10 individuals were aware that the BAC limit had become stricter. Half of the respondents said the lower limit made them less likely to drive after drinking.

2) Enact a zero tolerance BAC level for drivers under the age of 21.

The U.S. Department of Transportation reports that compared to drivers age 25 and older, alcohol-related fatalities are two times higher for 16-17 year-old drivers and three times higher for 18-20 year-olds.

Presently, 15 states have youthful DUI laws with BAC limits ranging from zero to .06 percent. Studies in several of those states indicate a drop in the number of drivers under age 21 involved in alcohol-related crashes.

Such a zero tolerance BAC level for minors in Pennsylvania would compliment our state's underage drinking law. Equally important, it would clearly establish the critical link between underage drinking and drunk driving.

3) Enact a zero tolerance BAC level for commercial drivers.

Pennsylvania, along with 47 other states, has a .04 BAC limit for drivers of commercial vehicles, however, it is unconscionable for a commercial driver, whose livelihood is based on driving, to be driving 40 tons of steel down a highway under ANY degree of impairment. A commercial driver's frequency on the roadway, combined with the size and weight of their vehicles, unquestionably increases the prospect and severity of an accident.

To draw a parallel, I would not permit State Troopers—who also spend a great deal of time on our

highways—to operate their patrol cars under any degree of impairment.

4) Enact and Administrative License Revocation law that would almost immediately suspend a drunk driver's license.

Currently, 32 states and the District of Columbia have Administrative License Revocation laws. Under such laws, officers seize a drunk driver's license at the scene and issue a temporary driving permit. Approximately 10 days later, the license can be revoked through an administrative proceeding.

In Pennsylvania, drunk drivers maintain their driving privileges until their DUI case is adjudicated. This process can take many months—facilitating the possibility of a repeat offense. By almost immediately suspending an individual's driving privilege, Administrative License Revocation laws reduce the prospect of repeat offenses. In addition, studies indicate that because the consequences are more closely connected to the offense, such laws are more effective deterrents than penalties that are levied several months after the offense.

Education, tough laws, aggressive enforcement and public activism will remain the rallying cry against drunk driving.

I'll continue to make this plea over and over again, please don't drink and drive. Think about the consequences. Beyond the inconvenience of losing your driver's license or the threat of spending time in jail, think about spending the rest of your life never being able to forget or make sense of the fact that you are responsible for killing or maiming an innocent person.

And as a drunk driver, don't expect any sympathy. There isn't much of it out there anymore.

### Thanks! A new feature in The Dallas Post

This week marks the debut of a new feature in The Post. Thanks! will be a place to let the rest of the Back Mountain know about people who show exceptional kindness or helpfulness to others.

Like most newspapers, The Post has been reticent to publish "thank you" letters because we know there are many others doing equally good work who might not be mentioned. But when Eleanor

Ambrose, who lives in the Meadows Apartments, asked us to publish her letter this week, we took a second look at our policy.

Why, we asked ourselves, shouldn't we allow recognition for all the good things being done in our community, when we appear so eager to publish the bad news?

Thanks! is the answer. It will appear on the same pages as letters and other opinion.

Thanks! will be open to just about any example of goodness that someone finds in folks in the Back Mountain. Submissions should be received by Fridays if they are to appear in the next week's issue.

And our thanks to Eleanor Ambrose for spurring us to rethink our policy.

Ron Bartizek  
Publisher

### Thanks!

It gives me great pleasure to compliment a very capable caring beautician working in the Meadows Nursing Home. She makes these women look and feel good about themselves by doing their hair with great individual care.

Keep up the good work. You are someone special.

Many thanks  
Elinore Ambrose  
Meadows Apts., Dallas

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