

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Oregonians' courage can bring health care to all

By MARY SHARON MOORE

Fven with the 2012 Affordable Care Act, access to affordable health care remains out of reach for too many Americans. People needing medical attention often go without or hope for some unexpected intervention (the lottery, say, or some miraculous healing). America can do better. And right now Oregon stands a chance of doing just that.

But what does "doing better" actually look like? My recent trip to the steps of our state Capitol to rally with others for health care finance reform offered me a first glimpse.

Oregon Rep. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, has drafted the Act for Affordable Health Care for All Oregon (House Resolution 2922). The bill has garnered some backing among Dembrow's colleagues, but needs much more support in the House, the Senate, and from Oregonians who feel pinched by health care costs.

The purpose of Dembrow's Health Care for All Oregon bill is to ensure access to high-quality, patient-centered and affordable health care for all Oregonians, to improve public health overall, and to reel in costs of health care. Who wins? Individuals, families, busi-

nesses and society as a whole.

The bill, which covers all people living or working in Oregon, would eliminate copayments and deductibles. This bill is not about changing the actual delivery of health care, but about reforming the convoluted means of financing it. Under this bill you and I would no longer be penalized for "going out of network" to get the care we need, nor would we lose our coverage through the loss of a job.

How is this new plan funded? Not by paying ever-increasing premiums to some Wall Street-driven company that dictates which health conditions and medical procedures it will cover. Rather, it will be funded by a progressively structured tax that will be paid directly to the Affordable Health Care for All Oregon Fund. If you think you don't want to pay another tax, just consider the hidden "tax" in every insurance premium and every bill you pay for doctors' visits, lab tests, scans, surgical procedures, emergency room visits and hospital stays — not only to cover those who cannot pay, but also to "give a little something" to insurance companies' shareholders.

Socialized medicine? Not at all. With socialized medicine doctors and hospitals are employed by the gov-

ernment. With Dembrow's plan, doctors retain their private practice, and the patient-doctor relationship is not dictated by an outsider as it is today with insurance companies. The government would not own or manage doctors' practices, clinics or hospitals. Yes, we definitely can do better.

Which brings me to a second glimpse of what "doing better" in health care looks like. I think of the paralytic in the Gospels who was carried on his mat by some people who recognized his need and his obvious inability to get to a source of healing. These people took him to the house where Jesus was. But the house was so packed that the four men carrying the man climbed up and tore a hole in the roof over the place where Jesus was, and lowered the man down. They would not let anything stand in the way of this stranger's needs.

That's the point: These people who befriended the paralytic recognized the situation and did the courageous thing. Because of their bold action Jesus healed the man.

If we want our loved ones, our neighbors, our fellow Oregonians to have access to affordable health care, we each and together need to do the next courageous thing. That might

mean educating yourself — as I have had to do — on the proposed legislation (hcao.org/legislative-tools). It might mean writing your state representatives (contact the League of Women Voters of Lane County at www.lwvnc.org) and telling them we urgently need their support of the Affordable Health Care For All Oregon Plan.

Or the next courageous thing might be attending a health care rally, or a health care house party, or making noise in the public square until affordable health care as a basic human right is established in our state.

As hole-in-the-roof friends of the medically afflicted, we still have work to do. It's high time for real conversation and courageous action on the moral and social dimensions of affordable health care for all Oregonians.

Mary Sharon Moore of Eugene is active in health care finance reform and other issues through Occupy Interfaith Eugene (contact Patty Hine at 541-343-5091, or e-mail occupyinterfaith@gmail.com). Rep. Dembrow's plan will be discussed at the HCAO-Eugene meeting at 7 p.m. Feb. 21 at the Eugene Water & Electric Board building (www.hcao-eugene.org).