



Comment: Health care meeting is a chance for input

Web Posted: 04/18/2006 12:00 AM CDT

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Health care is the No. 1 issue troubling Americans. That shouldn't be a surprise with 46 million Americans lacking health insurance.

The Express-News reports on a regular basis the effect on health systems, businesses, communities and families. This year, our country will spend more than \$2 trillion on health care, and that figure will double in seven years.

The United States ranks 24th to 38th in the world in key health status indicators, such as infant mortality. Since 2000, the average cost of health insurance has gone up more than 40 percent. It now costs an average family almost \$10,000 a year to be covered.

America, the richest nation on Earth, is one of the few countries that does not have universal health care. And it's having a devastating impact — as premiums skyrocket, more and more manufacturers are sending jobs overseas.

During 2005, Christus Santa Rosa Health Care provided \$29.2 million in charity care, \$33.7 million in unreimbursed care to patients covered by governmental programs such as Medicare and Medicaid and \$9.2 million in community programs.

We have health care workers who value the dignity of every human being and the sanctity of life from conception to natural death. Health care should be more than medicine and doctor visits. It is a fundamental building block for leading healthy, productive lives.

We believe we have a responsibility to ensure the common good and meet the needs of those who are less fortunate. We believe health care is a basic human right — not a commodity — and we pledge to create a health care system in the United States that works for everyone.

It's time to put politics aside and take meaningful steps toward a health care system that serves everyone. Nearly 46 million Americans, including more than 8 million children, are living without health insurance — forced to gamble every day that they won't get sick or injured. Uninsured Americans live sicker and die younger than those with health insurance.

As costs go up, fewer individuals and families can afford insurance, and fewer businesses can offer coverage to their employees. Having a job, even a full-time job, doesn't necessarily guarantee coverage. In fact, eight out of 10 uninsured Americans are in working families. Just one serious illness or injury can wipe out an uninsured family's bank account, and the problem

is only growing.

Would you like to tell the government your concerns about health care? You will have a chance to do so Wednesday at a Health Care Community Meeting at 5:30 p.m. at the San Fernando AT&T Community Center, 231 W. Commerce St. in downtown San Antonio. The event is an activity of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group, a national nonpartisan group charged with listening to the views of the American people and developing recommendations for the president and Congress to provide "health care that works for all Americans."

Community meetings have been held across the country, and now it's San Antonio's turn. Christus Santa Rosa Health Care and the Greater San Antonio Hospital Council are sponsoring this event and encouraging all San Antonians, in fact all Texans, particularly those who are uninsured or underinsured, to share their ideas. I urge you to lift up your voices and bring the moral dimension of health care for everyone to the national discussion.

Please call (210) 704-2955 to sign up. You must preregister at www.citizenshealthcare.gov/register or by phone. Refreshments will be served. If you can't make the meeting, log on to www.citizenshealthcare.gov. Make sure they hear from you.

Don Beeler is president and CEO of Christus Santa Rosa.

Online at: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/stories/MYSA041806.2O.beelercomment.c6645c9.html>