CITIZENS HEALTH CARE WORKING GROUP

PRESS CONFERENCE

Tuesday, June 7, 2005
9:30 a.m.

Jackson Medical Mall
Suite 615 Committee Room
350 West Woodrow Wilson Drive
Jackson, Mississippi 39213

APPEARANCES:

RANDALL L. JOHNSON, Chair
CATHERINE G. MCLAUGHLIN, Ph.D., Vice Chair
FRANK J. BAUMEISTER, Jr., M.D.
DOROTHY A. BAZOS, R.N.
MONTYE S. CONLAN
THERESE A. HUGHES, M.A.
AARON SHIRLEY, M.D.
DEBORAH R. STEHR
PROCEDINGS

(9:30 a.m.)

DR. SHIRLEY: This is a hearing from Citizens' Health Care Working Group. And to get right to it, I would like to introduce the Chair of that group, Randy Johnson, who's with the Motorola Corporation and the head of their Human Resources Strategic Initiatives Program.

So, Randy.

MR. JOHNSON: Oh, good morning -- or afternoon. Welcome. We're glad you're here. We're delighted to be here this afternoon in Jackson and tomorrow morning to conduct some hearings regarding health care.

The Citizens' Health Care Working Group is an organization that was formed because of the Medicare Modernization Act, and it includes 14 members who are appointed by the U.S. Comptroller General of the United States to serve in a manner that would listen to U.S. citizens on a nationwide basis. The objective has been to listen to citizens, not only in Washington, D.C., but throughout the nation, and
that's why we're here in Jackson.

If you think of our health care system,
you realize that we have a variety of issues to face.
And we have a variety and diversity of participants
in the Working Group that I'd like to introduce to you
just briefly today by name.

First, we have Catherine McLaughlin, who
is a Health Economist and a professor from the
University of Michigan. She is right over here. If
you will raise your hand, Catherine?

We have Frank Baumeister, who is a
physician from Oregon, and he's also the past
president of the Oregon Medical Association. I don't
see Frank here, but he's here for our hearings today,
and we're looking forward to his participation.

Dottie Bazos is a professor from Dartmouth
University, a registered nurse and health policy
consultant up in the northeast part of the United
States. She's here with us today.

Montye Conlan, a former Presidential Award
Winner for Math and Science, now dedicated to helping
people with multiple sclerosis, is right down here in
the second row.

Therese Hughes from California, Government Relations professional from the Venice Clinic and active in a variety of roles. Right down here in blue.

Deb Stehr is from Iowa. I don't see -- there she is second row down here. Deb is a Health Policy Advocate who served on Iowa's Health Consumer Advisory Council.

And we're going to introduce Aaron Shirley in just a minute or two.

Today we have 45,000,000 people in the United States who do not have coverage. The health care system isn't working for them. Sometimes we'll hear different numbers. Sometimes it's 45,00,000; sometimes it's 40,000,000; sometimes it's less than that. But whatever it is, that's a big number of people who do not have health care coverage.

Another statistic for you. Approximately 50 percent of the care we receive is not the recommended care. The health care system is not working for all Americans -- 50 percent.
I have a college roommate whose brother had a son, 42 years old. Went to the doctor, had chest pains. Doctor said muscle spasms. Five months later he died of a heart attack because of a medical error.

I have a friend of my son who played in the band with him, developed cancer, had surgery for the cancer, was recovering from the cancer surgery, but died of an infection. The health care system wasn't working for her.

I have another friend who's 85 years old, fell and broke her hip, had surgery. One leg came out an inch and a half shorter than the other. The health care system isn't working for her.

So our Working Group is a group of citizens, the Citizens' Health Care Working Group, whose intent it is to search for answers to find health care that will work for all Americans.

Today we spend on average $6,400 per person -- per person. So if you're from a family of four individuals, two adults and two children, for example, the cost for your family would be $26,000 a
year. And going to $11,000 per person by the year 2014. So that means for a family of four, $44,000 per person per year for health care coverage. That's not a health care system that's working for all Americans.

So we're here to listen. We're going to conduct some hearings tomorrow. We've already conducted some hearings in Washington, D.C., but we're going to not only do hearings here, but in Boston, in Salt Lake City, in Houston as well.

And then what our objective is once we conduct these hearings to provide a report to the American citizens, gain their feedback, to conduct community meetings throughout the United States and get feedback from American citizens that way. And then to provide a report to the President and to the Congress. Our objective again, health care that works for all Americans.

Today in addition to those who I have already introduced, I'd like to introduce a citizen who is not merely an ordinary physician. But Aaron Shirley has been providing care for all here and his influence has been felt throughout the United States.
He's an educator. He's a thought leader. He will lead our Community Meetings Committee as the chairperson. And I have found that even though he's soft spoken and doesn't speak a lot, when he speaks, we need to listen.

So we're going to listen to you right now, Aaron, as we hear a little bit more about your thoughts regarding the Citizens' Health Care Working Group.

DR. SHIRLEY: Thank you, Randy. It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome this wonderful, thoughtful group to the state of Mississippi. I've been asked to make comments on why I have taken an interest and sought to be a part of this group. The simple answer is, I don't like being a loser.

And back in 1993, I spent time with the -- with another attempt that the Clinton Administration made to bring health care and make health care available to all our citizens. And we struck out. So this gives me a second opportunity, and I'm sure that this go round we'll hit a home run.

Randy has mentioned the hearings tomorrow.
And I think it's befitting that Mississippi is a perfect place to have the first hearing outside of Washington. We have 418,900 uninsured residents of Mississippi. Three hundred and thirty thousand of those persons are between age 19 and 64, meaning they are in the working age population.

The hearing tomorrow will be here at the Mall in the Community Meeting Room. It will consist of three panels whose members will make presentations and field questions from the committee.

The first panel will focus on Access, Safety Net, and Health Disparities. The presenters will be Dr. Dan Jones, our own Dr. Dan Jones, Dean and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mississippi Medical Center; Roy Mitchell, Executive Director for the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program; and Dr. Herman Taylor, Director of the Jackson Heart Study as part of the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

The second panel will focus on the Reality of Being Uninsured. And participants in that panel will be two uninsured Mississippi residents.

The third panel will focus on Local Access
Initiatives with the representation from the Chamber of Commerce; and an individual from local Community Health Center, Dr. Janice Bacon with the G.A. Carmichael Community Health Center; and Primus Wheeler, Executive Director of the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation.

As Randy has mentioned, these presentations and dialogue -- from these presentations and dialogue, it is hoped the Committee will be able to better understand and eventually articulate to the U.S. Congress the unique challenges as well as opportunities presented by the uninsured in a typical Deep South state which has a significant number of black as well as low income races -- low income residents of both races.

The proceedings tomorrow will be open to the public. And we hope all of you who are interested will join us. So again, the hearing will begin tomorrow, eight o'clock, Jackson Medical Mall, Community Meeting Room. Please come out, and I believe every one attending will learn a lot.

Randy.
MR. JOHNSON: We'd like to open the time up for questions that you might have for either Dr. Shirley or myself. But I'd like to before we do that just say thank you for your participation this afternoon. We're glad that you're here. We look forward to a good discussion tomorrow and working toward that goal of providing health care that works for all Americans.

Any questions that anybody has?

Yes, sir.

PARTICIPANT: I'd just like to know about the statistics you might have on infant mortality rate, particularly in the Delta region.

MR. JACKSON: The question for everybody if you didn't hear was, do we have statistics available for infant mortality here in the Delta region.

First, I'm not aware of the data regarding that, sir. But one of the reasons for hearings is that we hear more about information at each location. And potentially that will be something that will come up in tomorrow's hearings. But at this time we are
not familiar, unless you have information regarding that.

DR. SHIRLEY: That information is readily available right down the hall at the State Health Department. But in general the Delta figures are pretty high among the black population. In the Delta infant mortality rate is somewhere around 14, 15 per hundred live births, which is a little higher than most of rest of the state.

MR. JOHNSON: Other questions?

PARTICIPANT: When will this conclude, these nationwide hearings?

MR. JOHNSON: The question is when will our Citizen's Health Care Working Group initiatives include -- conclude.

We're in the process of doing hearings and in the initial stages of preparing a report that should be done by close to end of the third quarter. And then we'll put this report on the website for people to comment. And then do, following that, community meetings nationwide.

Following that, we prepare a report to the
President and Congress. And the schedule for that is to be in the third quarter of next year.

   Yes, ma'am?

PARTICIPANT: Are the citizens here volunteers, the Working Group, the members who were named?

   MR. JOHNSON: The question is, are the participants -- are the Working Group members volunteers?

   And the Working Group members were selected from across the country. Dr. Shirley is the one representative who is from here in Mississippi. But we have representatives from California, South Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Florida, Texas, the Northeast part of the United States, and so forth. So we are all selected.

   None of us are in associations that are geared to lobby primarily, but we are citizens who have been selected who applied to have an opportunity to participate in the Working Group.

   You want to comment?

   DR. SHIRLEY: And we all did volunteer.
We were not drafted.

MR. JOHNSON: Other questions?

Well, seeing that there are none that are raised right now, Dr. Shirley and I would be open to staying for a few minutes if you have additional questions.

But again, thank you very much for your joining us this afternoon, and we'll look forward to our hearings tomorrow. Have a good day.

(Whereupon, this session of the hearing was adjourned at 12:48 p.m.)