

Rank and file must build a better health care system

By **KATHLEEN O'CONNOR**

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

"What are you doing over here? No one comes to this part of the state," someone asked me when I was in Pendleton last month.

But as we see it at CodeBlueNow!, past health care reform efforts have failed because of just that mentality: As conventional thinking goes, some people just don't matter when it comes to health care reform.

So we're trying to do it differently by engaging as many Oregonians as possible in building a health system that works for all Oregonians. What clearly is not working for ranchers and farmers is the deadly combination of health care costs and fuel costs.

It's time we got together and did something about it. Oregonians have a longstanding tradition of making things work when they put their minds to it, from the bottle bill to the Oregon Health Plan.

It's time, once again, that we the people jump into the fray and build a health system that works, gets rid of waste and inefficiencies, and finally brings costs under control by having clear goals, outcomes and accountability.

Of the seven top industrial nations, we pay the most and have the worst outcomes in terms of life expectancy, health outcomes and infant mortality. We have a disease-based, not wellness-based system of care, 600,000 Oregonians have no health insurance, and even those with insurance cannot always get the services they need.

We must do better, and we can, if we work together.

Starting today, you can get involved. CodeBlueNow! has a unique survey we're using to find out what you think is important for a new health care system. Just complete it at our Web site and we'll report back with Pendleton-specific information and a picture of the state as a whole.

Then we'll present some solid evidence on what Oregonians want in a health care system so the Governor and the legislature will have to take us seriously and act.

Here in Oregon, where CodeBlueNow! was founded, we're traveling to communities across the state and working with numerous civic organizations, such as the League of Women Voters of Oregon, the Grange, United Way of Lane and Jackson Counties, St. Vincent de Paul, and faith communities, and others to join with us as we grow, so we can to create a vision for the health care future of Oregon. Like our founding fathers, we are starting with core values and we too have a declaration, a Declaration for the Health of Oregon.

We believe that:

- Prevention and wellness should be the focus of the system, improving our health and lowering costs over time.

- Health care programs and services should be designed so they are simple and understandable and assure a basic set of services defined and chosen by the public.
- We, the people, must have the power, authority, tools and responsibility to make our own health care decisions; and,
- We have the knowledge and expertise to find ways to build a sustainable and affordable health care system which eliminates all the current inefficiencies.

This is an exciting time for health care in Oregon.

If you, too, believe in these values, and want better outcomes and cost control from your health care system, we urge you to get involved. Your health - and the health of your family and businesses - depend on you.

Get involved.

You can make a difference. Take that survey now.

*Kathleen O'Connor is founder and chief executive officer of CodeBlueNow!
East Oregonian
www.eastoregonian.com*