



# Health care as commodity not the future, expert says

By MIKE DENNISON - IR State Bureau - 02/21/08

If Montanans and Americans want health-care access for all, they should view health care as a human right, not a "commodity" controlled and sold by private interests, a human-rights expert says.

And if that right is recognized, our democratic government — in other words, the people — can work toward a health-care system that serves everyone rather than the profits of insurance and health-industry corporations, says Anja Rudiger of the Human Right to Health Program.

"We can all do this together," Rudiger said in an interview this week. "It shouldn't be run exclusively by the corporations as it is now. We are human beings who have the right to health care."

She also says Montana could be a prime laboratory for developing health-care systems that serve everyone equally, because it's a small-population state where people know and care about their neighbors.

"This seems to still be a state where you get this community spirit, where you can get things done just because people sort of pull together and want something done," Rudiger says.

Rudiger, a political scientist and human rights expert who grew up in Germany and lives now in New York, is visiting Montana this week, speaking to political leaders, health-care activists, medical professionals and others.

She came to Montana at the invitation of the Montana Human Rights Network, a Helena-based group.

Rudiger's Human Right to Health Program is a joint project of two nonprofit groups that advocate for social rights and health care for low-income people.

Rudiger says the project doesn't push for a specific type of health-care system. Rather, it has a set of principles that evaluate whether a system treats health care as a human right.

Those principles include universal access to care, affordability of care, equitable care and comprehensive care. The United States is the only industrialized nation that doesn't guarantee universal health-care access for its citizens, she says.

The project doesn't categorically denounce systems that rely on private corporations to provide health care. However, if private, for-profit interests dominate the system, the human-rights principles often aren't met, Rudiger says.

"It just seems that wherever we look, where there is profit involved, it's really hard to realign the incentives so that the profit motive doesn't take over," she says.

For example, one reform promoted by some in America would mandate people to buy health insurance. Rudiger says this model doesn't guarantee universal access, doesn't ensure insurance will be affordable, and creates a new bureaucracy to enforce insurance-buying mandates — and therefore fails the human-rights test.

In Montana, steps toward universal health care and defining health care as a human right don't have to be on a grand scale, Rudiger says.

Among other things, the state could expand programs that already work, such as the Children's Health Insurance Plan, which provides government-funded insurance for kids, or Insure Montana, which subsidizes health insurance for small businesses employees.

Expanding these smaller "pools" of people with access to health care can evolve into bigger pools, and that's what needs to happen if Americans are to achieve universal access, she says.

"Montana is on the right track," she says. "You need to keep pushing those boundaries further."

"We would like to get people to see that (corporate control) is not the future of our health-care system. It won't lie with those big, private corporations with those profit-making interests, and the sooner that people see that, the sooner (these corporations) can get out of the way, and we can realize our rights to health."



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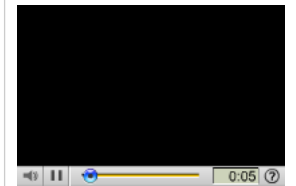
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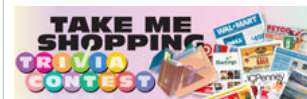


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