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The May 1 rally

By **RICHARD DAVIS**

Wednesday, April 22
 GUILFORD

It seems like it should be a no-brainer. Access to a basic level of health care should be a human right, something that a civilized society determines is due all of its citizens. In all of the industrialized countries in the world, except one, that is the case.

The one exception is the United States. We may feel ashamed about the actions of this country over the past eight years, about how we treated prisoners and how we treated other countries, but we should be most ashamed of how we have treated each other.

The problem is simple. The United States has held to the belief that health care should be just another market commodity from which to make a profit. In a capitalist society, nothing is off limits for profit making, but there should be exceptions.

There are already many exceptions. We don't make a profit on police and fire protection and we don't make a profit on public libraries and public education (although there are efforts to change that). Our society has had the good sense to understand that there are some basic human services that should be available to everyone and that should be paid for by taxes.

Why is health care so different? It has to do with history and politics. Every time there was a national effort to establish the human right to health care for Americans, powerful lobbyists were able to hold politicians hostage.

First it was the American Medical Association.

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They didn't want the government cutting into their income and their ability to have all of the power in the medical world. More recently it has been the pharmaceutical and insurance industries trying to protect their profits.

If you have more money than everyone else and you spread it around to fertilize the war chests of perpetually campaigning politicians you get what you want. That is the American way. The real root of the problem is campaign finance reform, but the fox is guarding the hen house and that leaves little hope for serious change.

Surveys and polls continue to show that Americans want everyone to have access to a basic level of health care services. Those same polls indicate that about 75 percent of people would be willing to pay more in taxes to make that happen.

Here's where it gets complicated. In order for all of us to have a health care system that serves all Americans, most of us would actually pay less. We already spend twice as much as any other country on health care but we don't do as well as many other

countries when it comes to life expectancy, infant mortality and overall health.

What is all of that money paying for? It keeps a privileged class of Americans healthy, allows the rest of us to be marginally healthy if we don't go bankrupt in the process and lines the pockets of insurance and drug companies so they can make the highest profits of any businesses on the planet.

The big question is how to change all of that when you don't have piles of money to fight the big battle. Well, you do what the Vermont Workers Center does. You organize people all over a state and you educate them and get them engaged. It is a long, slow process and it is difficult to measure success because you are trying to break a rock in two by dripping water on it one drop at a time.

A few of those drops will be felt on Friday, May 1, at noon in front of the Statehouse in Montpelier when the Vermont Workers Center hopes to fill the lawn with thousands of people who will let their elected officials know that they believe health care must be a human right.

It is the kind of event where numbers are important. It is also the kind of event that has the potential to move health care reform forward because there is a simple message, similar to what President Obama has done on health care.

The May 1 message to legislators is, "Make health care a human right. We'll leave the details up to you. Just get it done."

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For more information about rides and details about the event, go to www.workerscenter.org or call James Haslam, the Workers Center director at 802-861-2877 and tell him I sent you.

Richard Davis is a registered nurse and executive director of Vermont Citizens Campaign for Health. He writes from Guilford and welcomes comments at rdav@comcast.net.

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