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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

**If You Can't Join 'Em,
Have 'Em Arrested!
Solidarity America
By John Funicello
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**



Mark Thompson interviews John FUniciello

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It's indelibly etched in the mind.

The U.S. Senate Finance Committee had a hearing on health care reform and left out one option that the American people seem to want - single-payer universal health care.

On May 5, when several people stood up to speak for single-payer, Chairman Max Baucus, D-Montana, called the police and, one by one, the advocates were taken from the room, as the chairman and members of the committee laughed about not having enough police.

Americans have been waiting since at least the middle of the 20th Century for some kind of universal health care and, since it was proposed by President Harry Truman in the years after World War II, the health care industry has been able to beat it back every time.

When candidate Barack Obama said he would reform health care, few foresaw that his system would feature the same "industry" that has brought the country to the low level of health care that exists today.

It's generally acknowledged that there are 47 million without health care in the U.S. What's not generally acknowledged is that there might be an equal number who have inadequate insurance.

Usually, that's not clear until someone tries to use their health insurance and they find out that their procedure is not covered or they didn't follow the rules to the letter, or a decision was made inside an insurance company that *you* won't be covered at this time for this malady or treatment. Insurance companies - which exist for profit - are securely in charge of the health care system, if it can be called that. Many of the medical decisions are theirs to make.

They need to make a profit for their executives and for their stockholders. That comes first, and then come the people who depend on them for health care.

Senator Baucus' hearing included not one representative of single-payer health care, the kind of system that we have in Medicare.

That is a single-payer plan and it covers everyone 65 years of age and older for doctor's visits, tests, hospital care, and for some prescription drugs. It doesn't cover vision care or dental care. It's not a complete system, but, everyone is in. Nobody's out.

All of the big guns of the health care industry were at Baucus' hearing. They're the people who take a large chunk of the health care money off the top, and the senator and his colleagues were listening closely to them, as the industry representatives fought valiantly to maintain their position in the national economy.

What the senator and the committee didn't want to hear was anything that upsets the plan to combine a "public" portion, along with the private companies, which for decades have sucked dry the health care pool of money.

President Obama also reportedly favors a public-private plan, with the insurance industry still in charge of much of the system. That's not what the people say they want. But, why would they want more of the system that bankrupts working people and leaves out tens of millions to sicken and, often, die, without access to regular and minimal health care?

Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., several years ago introduced HR 676, a bill that would expand and improve Medicare, and provide it for everyone. It would be paid for with the money that is now taken out of the system by private companies for salaries, bonuses, perks, and profits. Hundreds of local unions, labor councils, and state federations, representing millions of workers, have endorsed HR 676, which would cover everything, similar to what most developed countries have had for a generation or two. Millions of other Americans are demanding a change from the current system.

If anyone thinks that the "military-industrial complex" will fight to its last nuclear weapon to save its stunningly large portion of the American GNP, what was described

in 1980 as the "medical-industrial complex" by A.S. Relman was on grand display at Senator Baucus' hearing on May 5.

Relman, a physician who wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine* 29 years ago about the "corrosive effects" of the medical-industrial complex, predicted the following outcomes, if the U.S. kept the market-based (read Corporate America-based) system of health care:

- More than 40 million uninsured,
- Continued gaps in safety net coverage,
- Double-digit health plan rate increases,
- Smaller employers cutting coverage or even dropping plans,
- Increased co-payments and deductibles for workers,
- Large rate increases for private insurers in shrinking markets,
- Numerous failures of HMOs and withdrawal from the market by larger insurance companies,
- Continued cost-shifting in increasingly fragmented markets, and
- Continued inflation of health care costs.

Every one of these predictions had come true a dozen years later, in the early 1990s, when the Clinton Administration made its failed stab at health care reform. In 2003, Dr. John P. Geyman of the Department of Family Medicine, University of Washington in Seattle, made reference to Relman's predictions when he listed in the *International Journal of Health Services* what he termed the six myths that are barriers to health care reform in the United States,

The myths are:

- The uninsured and underinsured get the care they need, the U.S. does not ration health care,
- The free market is the best way to resolve our health system's problems,
- Incremental changes can solve our health system's problems,
- The U.S. has the best health system in the world, and
- National health insurance should not be given attention because it is politically unfeasible

Those myths were on display at Senator Baucus' hearing, as well. Not only had all of Relman's predictions come true many years earlier, but all of the usual suspects - the people about whom he made the predictions - were at the hearing table. It was like a gathering of old friends. And, why not? The senators at the hearing, Republican and Democratic, have a cozy relationship with those representatives of the medical-industrial complex. Lots of money flows from one side to the other. On May 5, it was free speech for the corporations and arrest for the people, an old story.

Eighty percent of the uninsured in America live in working families. That is, someone or

everyone works, yet they don't qualify for health insurance or they can't afford it. They were not represented at Baucus' table.

When eight people representing them and all of the other Americans who want a complete change in health care stood up in the hearing room, they were arrested and hauled out. A few days later, another five were arrested under similar circumstances.

That's not enough to get a hearing for Expanded and Improved Medicare for All. The people still are not represented at the table. The Congress' contempt for those who want real change was evident and it will be difficult for that position to be heard, because any private-public system is going to maintain the status quo.

Things have gotten much worse in American health care since Relman's predictions (1980) and Geyman's list of myths (2003) which keep us from real change. In fact, the economic downturn of the past few years has compounded the worst of our health care.

If there is no change to rid the system of the profit motive, it could be another couple of generations before there is a real effort to get the medical-industrial complex off our backs.


In the meantime, the hearings will drone on and, when the going gets tough for our elected representatives - that is, they have to listen to what they don't want to hear - they'll simply call in more cops.


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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, John Funciello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funciello.

[Contents of Issue](#)
[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

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