

## 2009 Addendum

Vermont Workers' Center  
Human Rights Day  
10 December 2009

Sixty-one years ago today, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established, for the nations of this world, a common definition of their responsibility to the people of the world. In doing so, the Declaration posed a challenge to those who hold power in governments – a challenge to end the suffering and the waste of human lives caused by violence, oppression and injustice.

One year ago today, the Vermont Workers' Center celebrated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a vision of social justice, a vision that arose from a period of human history in which the world was wracked by horrific violence, tyranny and oppression – a vision of a world that had not yet ever existed.

We live, today, in a world no less wracked by horrific violence, tyranny and oppression than ever. We continue to ask: How much longer will we tolerate injustice? How much longer must people suffer?

It was out of both horror and a moral commitment to effect change that, a year ago, we described the needless suffering and death caused in Vermont by our cruel healthcare system, a system in which people suffer and die because – ultimately – denying healthcare is more profitable than providing it. Little has changed since the Vermont Workers' Center issued its report, *Voices of the Vermont Healthcare Crisis*.

Though the United States continues to spend more on healthcare than any other nation, we do not provide real healthcare to all. And we face, today, the greatest disparity of wealth that this country has ever known.

Here, in Vermont, our neighbors and friends continue to die – and our families continue to suffer – needlessly, because we have not yet realized the universal right to healthcare.

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The federal effort at healthcare reform has disappointed us. Though the process is unfinished, it has from the start been co-opted by interests that make the satisfaction of human rights principles impossible.

We ask: Does the system provide healthcare to all? Or are some groups of people excluded, as if they are not entitled to a human right?

We ask: Does the system provide equal access to healthcare services? Or does it separate people into different tiers of access or coverage, thus increasing administrative costs and weakening the system itself?

We ask: Does the system treat healthcare as a public good? Or does the system treat healthcare as a source of profit for powerful vested interests?

We ask: Does the system eliminate barriers to use of needed healthcare services? Or do out-of-pocket costs continue to discourage people from accessing the care that they need?

We ask: Is the system financed equitably? Or do people pay for healthcare based on conditions that are unrelated to their ability to pay, such as age?

We ask: Does the system use money efficiently? Or do numerous "payers" with numerous administrative systems introduce unnecessary costs that add nothing to the quality of the healthcare provided?

We ask: Does the system allocate resources efficiently? Or are some communities better served than others?

We ask: Does the system tend to improve the quality of healthcare, by rewarding providers who utilize best practices and provide excellent outcomes? Or does the system simply pay providers for performing medical procedures?

We ask: Is the system accountable to the people it serves? Or is it complex, mysterious and unresponsive?

We ask: Have those creating the system sought to include and involve ordinary people in this process, or has the design and drafting been left to specialists and insiders?

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The federal reform proposals each include a few positive elements, such as expanding access to healthcare for the poor and increasing regulation of health insurers. But because each is based on the principle of a health insurance mandate, the proposals entrench the treatment of healthcare as a commodity rather than a human right.

The federal reform proposals do far too little to address the fundamental problem of the United States' healthcare system: the rising costs of healthcare. Without addressing this fundamental problem, the proposals will leave many millions underinsured – stuck with the same inadequate private health insurance plans that have failed to protect people from financial ruin brought on by serious illness or injury.

In excluding undocumented workers, women seeking reproductive healthcare and many of the working poor, the federal reform proposals simply fail to satisfy the goal of establishing universal healthcare.

It is hard to explain or justify a healthcare reform approach based on a health insurance mandate and lacking in comprehensive cost controls by any logic other than that of treating healthcare as a source of profit for the health insurance, pharmaceutical and other medical industries.

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Through more than two centuries, the values of Vermonters have not changed. As we have for centuries, we still believe in caring for our neighbors. We still abhor selfishness and greed. We still are annoyed by waste.

It is these enduring shared values of Vermonters that have caused our state, time after time, to lead the nation in the establishment and protection of human rights.

The struggle for universal healthcare is a struggle that engages the enduring shared values of Vermonters:

Vermonters are disgusted by a system in which corporations reap obscene profits by ensuring not the care of people's health but their suffering and death;

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Vermonters are appalled by the waste of human lives in a system that treats a human right not as a public good but as a commodity, a source of profit for those whose minds are corrupted by selfishness and greed, and

Vermonters are unsurprised by the brazen corruption in our Congress, a situation demanding, once again, that Vermont lead this nation in establishing a fundamental human right, the right to healthcare.

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For many years we were told, in the halls of power, that universal healthcare was not “politically possible.”

For the last two years, the Vermont Workers’ Center has been building a network of Vermonters committed to changing what is politically possible.

On May 1, 2009, more than a thousand Vermonters gathered at the Statehouse to demand healthcare as a human right, in the largest workday rally in recent history.

This fall, at forums in towns across the State, Vermonters have invited their elected representatives to work with them to enact in law the human right to healthcare. Vermonters are telling their legislators that obstacles can no longer be used as excuses for inaction but instead must be overcome. Scores of legislators and many hundreds of their constituents have participated, so far; and these forums will continue through the start of the legislative session.

Each day, through grassroots organizing, a mass movement of Vermonters demanding healthcare as a human right continues to grow.

Now, in the halls of power, we are no longer told that a human right is a political impossibility.

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The time has come for Vermont to lead the way in establishing the human right to healthcare. And we are ready.

On January 6, at the start of the legislative session, we will deliver thousands of postcards expressing Vermonters' demand that the legislature establish a system of universal healthcare that is equitable, is accountable to the people and eliminates all barriers to healthcare.

We will bring Vermonters to the Statehouse again on January 12 for a joint hearing of the House Healthcare and Senate Health & Welfare committees. We will return for further hearings throughout the session. Our county organizing committees will be a constant, grassroots presence in the Statehouse throughout the session, holding their representatives accountable.

On May 1, 2010, Vermonters from every corner of the state will again gather on the Statehouse lawn. By then, we will have become a catalyst for change nationwide, making our vision of justice a reality.

Join us.