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[For 12 Million Living with Cancer, Change to Healthcare Status Quo is Essential](#)

by [Doug Ulman](#)

categories: [Cancer](#), [Health Care Reform](#)

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Doug Ulman, the President and CEO of the Lance Armstrong Foundation, is part of Change.org's [Changemakers](#) network, comprised of leading voices for social change.

You couldn't write fiction more dramatic than this. The outcome of one special statewide election throws the entire national health care reform effort into jeopardy.

By resetting the clock on the reform effort, Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown's election throws many Americans' hopes for accessible, affordable care into jeopardy. The Senator has stated his opposition to the current bill, his point being that he comes from a state with the most generous health care system in the nation and that the current package would cost his constituents more for something they already have. I get that. But for the rest of America, it's a blow.

From the perspective of the cancer community, it's tragic to see an issue as fundamentally important to life as medical care become so politicized. In this day and age, none of us should suffer and die because we don't have the cash to see a doctor. Yet far too many of us do, particularly in minority and underserved communities. Cancer will become the leading cause of death worldwide in 2010. More than half a million Americans will lose their lives to the disease this year. And to the 12 million living with cancer, a change to the status quo is essential.

While the current legislation is probably doomed, Republicans would be foolhardy to ignore Americans' appetite for change. If there's one thing we've learned since this effort began last July, it's that voters all over the nation are sick and tired of the current conditions in our health care system. From discrimination by insurance companies against the millions of us with "pre-existing conditions" to lack of affordable care, we've had enough of things the way they are.

However Congress tackles health care reform -- whether in an omnibus bill or piece by piece -- the important thing is that they tackle it. Now.

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1.

Republicans propose a reform that will address cost containment and access strategies, tort reform, insurance fraud, medicare and medicaid fraud and will not serve special interests groups at the expense of others. Cancer patients should consider themselves very lucky that this reform bill didn't get shoved through without due dilligence. This bill will restrict research, patient care and pharmaceutical care. I think you should reevaluate

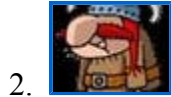
what political party you are affiliated with in your emotional cry out for cancer health care reform.

Posted by [nancy randall](#) on 01/22/2010 @ 12:35PM PT

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As a mentor of mine used to say to me when I made blanket a assertion without backing up my argument. "Whatever you can freely assert, I can freely deny.

Over and over again, Republicans reiterate that Health Care Reform is a bad thing. They do this by turning it into a purely ideological battle, with no practical effects. They refuse to acknowledge that our present system is unjust, unstable, and unsustainable. They refuse to acknowledge that it's killing people now, and it will kill more people if we don't fix it. This is because they are cold war reactionaries with the brainpower of bacteria, and the morals to match.

Posted by [Martin Bring](#) on 01/23/2010 @ 08:13AM PT

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First off Doug, thank you for the work you do. I work on a hematology/oncology floor in the local childrens hospital and these kids are what gets me up in the morning (well at night, I work the overnight shift). I firmly believe that we should always be looking for ways to win the psychological battle with cancer as that is just as important as the physical battle.

That being said I believe that the bill that was in the senate would not have helped the children on my floor, on the contrary I believe that many of the procedures that we do would be unavailable to families were we to move to more of a socialized health care. Interestingly enough I was talking to a parent last night (her child was an AML patient who is post transplant) and she was at a conference with other parents of children with cancer and leukemia. Many of them were from Canada who came to the United States because the procedures they needed to save their childrens lives simply would not have

been done, or not done in time to save their childrens lives. The fact is that a child has the best chance to beat cancer here in the United States. We take the long shots that other nations with national health care would simply put on palitive care, and more so than any other country these kids get to live life past their fight with cancer. I'm proud of that.

I believe we need reform, but it needs to be forward progress, not backward. Many people see the health care debate as what happens when they go to the doctors office or the pain of having health insurance and it's ever increacing appatite for their paycheck. To me it's not a debate, it's faces. It's the beds I change because a child is so overloaded with fluids they can't make it to the bathroom. It's holding hands rather than putting on restraints because a child is too sick to realize they are pulling at their port, and staying up with them all night to make sure they are ok (that was my night last night actually). It's the faces of the kids that don't get to have any more birthdays, that is what is at stake.

I will be the first person to say we need reform in health care, but I think we can do better than what congress has proposed. Untill I see a bill that fixes what is broken witout breaking what works I will not be in support of change for changes sake. We simply have too much at stake.

Posted by [Seth Piepgrass](#) on 01/22/2010 @ 01:27PM PT

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5.

The Senate bill was weak compared to the House Bill. That said, neither the House nor the Sanate was advocating for "socialized" medicine or a Canadian style system. Also, separating faces from their ability to get health insurance and pay for their medical care makes little sense. On the whole, the U.S. health care system has more trade offs that compromise our health than those nations who've instituted health care reform. The U.S. ranks 37th in outcomes when compared to other industrialized nations. It is more fragmanted, complex, and inefficient.

On another note, one of the biggest enemies of health care reform has been employer based coverage. When that system collapses, the complacency of those insured through it will be gone and the demand for health care reform will be far more shrill.

Posted by [Martin Bring](#) on 01/23/2010 @ 08:40AM PT

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6.

I take it you are citing the W.H.O. ranking when you say we are ranked 37th. That is hardly a flawless system. Personally I'd be more swayed by solid apples to apples mortality numbers and not a survey that puts political issues into the mix. Most people I know would rather be giving \$5 a month to the hospital for the rest of their lives rather than not have access to procedures that may save their lives. In the US we have that option. It's not a great option but it is better than not having the option at all. If you take the raw survival rates for cancer we are the place to be hands down.

Posted by [Seth Piepgrass](#) on 01/24/2010 @ 05:14PM PT

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7.

Americans would be very lucky to have the kind of health care that we Canadians have. 100% of Canadians have access to high quality health care and far better outcomes than the average American has access to.

In Canada, the only people making medical decisions are physicians and patients. In the US, you have insurance company bureaucrats, not physicians, making your medical decisions while they ration your health care to improve the insurance company's bottom line.

Canada has universal health care. The US has a health care system taken over by insurance companies which denies health care to 38% of Americans (17% uninsured, 21% underinsured).

Of 19 industrialized nations, the US is the only one not to have universal health care. In health care rankings of the 19 industrialized nations, Canada ranks #6, Britain ranks #17, and US insurance-run and rationed health care ranks 19th and dead last.

45,000 Americans die each year from lack of access to health care. 225,000 Americans die from medical mistakes each year, many from unnecessary surgery which is rampant in the US.

All of these things show that most Americans have health care that is on a par with people in a third world nation, and obviously US insurance-run and rationed health care is vastly inferior to the health care that all Canadians have.

Posted by [John Murphy](#) on 01/25/2010 @ 06:36PM PT

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9.

With respect John when it comes to cancer you are wrong. Don't misunderstand, there are things about the canadian health care system that are good, especially if you are relatively healthy and relatively young. The problem is that when you get to things like cancer you are dealing with a timeclock that is not forgiving. I think the UK was setting a goal for getting access whittled down to 18 weeks from diagnosis to beginning of treatment, and that is the goal, not what patients are receiving. That is WAY too long, especially if you have an aggressive cancer. Last shift I was on we had a child who came in that morning, during the day got a diagnosis of leukemia and by evening had his first unit of blood and was getting a workup for chemo. Say what you want but that is damn good. Really that is what makes the difference in cancer care, it is fast access to quality care.

John I never said that there aren't things that the US needs to do to improve the way our health care works, the fact is that it's not so bad as Michael Moore would have you believe. People are treated regardless of their ability to pay, doctors do care about their patients (several hold vigil with the families when one of our kids loses the fight), and we take on the long shots that other countries simply don't. I understand that you love the health care in Canada, that is great and I'm glad it has worked out for you. The point is that in the health care debate we can't throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. I'm all for improving access to health care. I'm all for making health care more affordable, but I believe that we can do that without sacrificing the quality of care.

Cancer survival statistics taken from this site;

<http://www.ncpa.org/pub/ba596>

Posted by [Seth Piepgrass](#) on 01/26/2010 @ 02:19AM PT

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10.

It is refreshing to see a Cancer advocate (is that the proper term) advocate for coverage. I frankly get a bit annoyed with all the focus on a cure for cancer when there are treatments available now, except they are not available to people without insurance and sometimes, without the right insurance.

So thank you.

Posted by [james mcgee](#) on 01/27/2010 @ 05:45PM PT

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Author



Doug Ulman is a three-time cancer survivor and nationally recognized cancer advocate. After overcoming chondrosarcoma and malignant melanoma twice during his sophomore year in college, Doug and his family founded the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults, a non-profit organization to provide support, education, and resources to young adults, their families and friends who are affected by cancer. He served as Executive Director of the Ulman Cancer Fund for four years before joining LIVESTRONG as director of survivorship in 2001.

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