

The ARCHIMEDES MOVEMENT

Why Start With the Health Care Crisis?

The crisis in our health care system may prove to be the issue around which we can begin to heal the divisions within our society - because it affects us all. Employers and employees; urban and rural; rich or poor; young and old; it cuts across party registration and political philosophy. It is the great leveler - because all of us will grow old; all of us will need the health care system. And all of our futures are bound, in one way or another, to its fate.

The first challenge on which the Archimedes Movement will focus is the growing crisis in our health care system. Putting this challenge first does not necessarily mean that it is the most important. On the contrary, education, sustainable economic development and long term environmental stewardship are equally important for the future of our society - but the growing cost of our health care system is compromising our ability to invest in these other areas.

Furthermore, *health* - not health care - is the first rung on the ladder of opportunity; it is the cornerstone of a democratic society; allowing people to fully participate, to be productive, and to take advantage of the opportunities of upward mobility that lie at the heart of the American Dream. And health is the product not just of health care, but also of education, housing, stable employment and a clean environment, to mention but a few. And it is the implications and opportunity costs involved with spending an ever growing portion of our public resources on this segment alone which makes addressing this crisis so imperative.

Consider the fact that since 2003 Medicaid has exceeded the cost of primary and secondary education as the largest item in many state budgets, undermining our ability to invest in our public school system which offers the best opportunity for success - and meaningful civic engagement - for the fastest-growing portions of the American population.

Rising medical costs eat into corporate margins, reduce the capacity of firms to grow and compromise competitiveness in the global economy. They slow the rate of job growth, suppress wage increases for existing workers and foster labor disputes and lost productivity. The inability to pay a medical bill is now the second leading cause of personal bankruptcy in America.

Even more disturbing is the fact that the cost of health care is rapidly becoming the major driver behind our national debt - the dark legacy we leave to our children. While Congress is preoccupied with the \$5 trillion Social Security gap, Medicare - when the baby boom generation retires - represents over \$65 trillion in unfunded entitlements. And this

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staggering debt is being financed by China and other countries still willing to purchase U.S. securities.

If these other countries should decide that they are unwilling to continue to underwrite U.S. deficit spending, it will precipitate a currency crisis, soaring interest rates and a collapse of the stock market. There are those who argue that China, for example, will not do this because it is in their interest to keep the U.S. economy strong to purchase Chinese products. The point is that it is their decision now, not ours - we are literally handing our financial future over to some of our major economic competitors, putting at risk the independence and self-determination which lie at the heart of our national identity.