

POINTS OF VIEW

Health-care system's sick, but not terminal

In a recent letter to the editor ("Think again, Joe," April 21) one of your readers misdiagnosed the remedies to the problems in America's health-care delivery system and made a false claim with regard to my participation in the health insurance plan offered to members of Congress. I believe it is important to set the record straight.

Creating the notion that America's health-care system was in "crisis" seemed to be the central point of the letter.

Evidently, the author believes that by simply calling something a crisis enough times he can justify a massive government-run, Big Brother solution to the problems in our health-care system. I take strong issue with this all-intrusive approach to health-care reform.

Clearly, there are problems that need to be fixed in America's health-care delivery system. However, we must acknowledge that the United States still has the finest health care in the world.

More than 90 percent of Michigan's citizens are covered by private, employ-

er-based health-care plans. For those who are uninsured, we must focus our efforts to provide adequate coverage to meet their health care needs.

However, providing necessary coverage to the uninsured should in no way compel us to reinvent our current system by entrusting every aspect of America's health care to the federal government.

I believe we must target our approach to fix what is wrong with health care, while maintaining and strengthening what is right with the system.

As a former small-business owner, I understand all too well the state of our nation's health-care delivery system. Day-in and day-out, I had the opportunity to help my employees and clients deal with the crush of burdensome paperwork, interpreting confusing policy language and making sure that their health dollars weren't wasted. Now as a member of Congress who has fought for meaningful health-care reform, I am still wrestling with these and other equally difficult health issues. I believe in the foundations of our health-care

GUEST COLUMNIST



U.S. REP. JOSEPH KNOLLENBERG

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delivery system, and I believe that no one person deserves better quality of care than another.

The writer suggests that it is easy for me to take a "no crisis" position because the taxpayer is funding my benefits. Contrary to the writer's assertions, I pay for my coverage through a private plan, and do not participate in the Congressional Health Plan.

We have problems in our health-care system that can be solved. I believe Americans deserve health-care reform that includes the following:

■ Portability of coverage — No one should lose their health-care coverage because of changes in their employment status.

■ Costs of coverage must come down — Rates should accurately reflect costs associated for that individual rather than a region or age group.

■ An end to the pre-existing conditions exclusion — No one should be denied coverage merely on the basis of whether or not they have had a specific illness or disability.

■ Technology needs to be introduced to help reduce needless paperwork — The

industry has been studying electronic conversion for several years, and with mounting health-care costs, now is the time to enact this change.

■ The self-insured need a tax deduction — By and large, the self-insured are small-business people who are providing as much insurance as they can afford. Is another tax the proper way to reward these people?

■ And finally, significant steps must be taken to ease burdensome and expensive litigation brought on by malpractice suits.

These challenges posed by the health-care debate revolve around self-determination vs. government-run bureaucracy.

I believe in the individual and the spirit of free-market competition. And it is this I am talking to Capitol Hill, and it is one we will ultimately win, guaranteeing quality care for all Americans.

U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg is a first-term U.S. representative from the 11th District, which includes Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Ghost of Jefferson pales at new gun control laws

Moonlight glowed on his classical-style monument on the shore of the Tidal Basin. The rest of Washington, D.C., was asleep or partying. The man's ghost stood 6-foot-3 and had a reddish tint to the hair, but his visage was said.

"My own party, my own party!" said Thomas Jefferson's spirit. "Passing gun controls — in the name of crime prevention!"

It was true. Each year Democrats hold "Jeff-Jack" banquets honoring Presidents Jefferson and Jackson, but last week the bulk of Democratic congressmen had supported a draconian gun measure.

Pointing to the newspapers, I whispered to him that the press was treating it as a defeat for the National Rifle Association.

"Pshaw!" said Jefferson's spirit. "The right to bear arms isn't about crime, or self-defense, or even hunting."

It's about keeping government under control.

"Man is the only animal which devours its own kind, for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor. I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical."

"Let them take arms," Jefferson said, warming up. "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

"Didn't you witness the French Revolution of July 1789 when we were envious?" I asked.

"The people armed themselves with such weapons as they could find in armors' shops and private houses, and with bludgeons," Jefferson's spirit recalled. "The next day, July 13, the Assembly pressed on the king to send away the troops, to permit the bur-



TIM RICHARD

geoisie of Paris to arm for the preservation of order in the city."

"I've been listening to Howard Simon of the American Civil Liberties Union," I replied. "He insists that 'this may come as a shock to people, but there is no Second Amendment right to own a handgun, a weapon or any gun. The Supreme Court has said the Second Amendment refers to a commitment to states to be able to maintain

their militias as a condition of joining the Union in the 18th Century."

"What is the militia," said Jefferson, raising his head and glaring, "but the people? The Minutemen at Concord and Lexington provided their own arms. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of 605 said the militia was a local defense force, made up of the entire free male population, each member of which was charged with providing his own armament. The Stuart Restoration of 1662 hoped to do away with professional soldiers — no standing army — and substitute a militia."

"It looks as if our Bill of Rights, which you insisted on, has been eroded," I replied. "but in Michigan we still have a clear constitutional right: Every person has a right to keep and bear arms for the defense of himself and the state."

"Bless the states like Michigan and Vermont!" the spirit said. "Vermont

allows any citizen who is not a felon or mental patient the right to carry a handgun. The Green Mountain people say 'an armed society is a polite society,' the spirit said."

Jefferson's spirit turned to me and urged me to keep writing about the Michigan Legislature's efforts to require that documents, meetings and lawsuit settlements be made public.

"The way to prevent these interpositions of the people is to give them full information of their affairs," the spirit said. "If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, Congress and Assemblies, judges and governors shall all become wolves."

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events, and also reads the collected works of Jefferson and the Michigan Constitution. You can reach him by Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1881.

LETTERS

Column Inflames

I am writing in response to the column by Mr. Tim Richard on May 5, 1994. His opinions are clearly written as another attempt to inflame public passions in the continuing attack on Michigan educators and their unions.

He says he is sadly reporting the facts about educators. But what is truly sad is that what he is giving the public are the half-truths and innuendoes of mean-spirited, scared legislators reacting to the outcry against their own actions.

Where is the fact that Sen. Geake called a Michigan teacher a "man-hater" because she questioned the actions of the male governor and male Legislature?

Where is the fact that Rep. Lyn Bankes verbally attacked a Michigan Teacher of the Year who tried to ask her about her position on H.B. 6128?

Where is the fact that Sen. Geake has spent a handsome chunk of his new \$9,500 public relations account, given to legislators by themselves from taxpayers' pockets in the name of "cost containment," on sending a personal letter to every teacher in his district, trying to explain to them why he voted for the bill that has severely curtailed their collective bargaining rights? Maybe he is just a little bit scared of re-election time?

And where are the facts that any teacher has been arrested and convicted for property damage or intimidation?

Isn't it just possible that Sen. Bouchard's van could have had a flat tire because of a nail in the road or a faulty valve?

If Sen. Bouchard wants to complain about role models, what about elected public officials who are repeatedly arrested for drunken driving and financial misdealings, etc., or sports heroes who are arrested for drug dealings and shoplifting, etc.? I think we know who are the best role models for our children.

And why is the governor's campaign manager collecting pictures of people on a peaceable picket line? I thought we did away with this kind of political tactics in the 1950s?

It probably is true that some union members have overreacted to the continuing attacks on their professional integrity and livelihood, but who wouldn't, given the climate in this state for the past few years?

And Mr. Richard, teachers do not have to read a copy of the bill handed to them in Lansing; we already know what it contains better than most. After all, it's our rights that are being trampled on.

But what is totally reprehensible and an outright attempt to smear the dedicated teachers of this state is his statement that the teachers in Lansing acted worse than the Ku Klux Klan did a few days later.

Mr. Richard, I personally joined thousands of

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other educators and their families, support workers, and other union members, who drove hundreds of miles, after teaching our children all day, to rally in Lansing.

We listened to speeches, ate hot dogs, and walked to the Capitol Building to listen to our union leaders and the leaders of fellow unions from across Michigan.

There were no police in riot gear, no tear gas thrown into the crowd, no arrests, and in fact, I don't recall seeing any police, except those directing traffic. I take your comments as a personal insult.

The right to peaceably assemble and protest is a cornerstone of our democratic society, and teachers have just as much right to let their elected representatives know that we don't agree with the way they are voting as any citizen in Michigan.

If the Republicans want to continue to conduct our state government in such a fashion, with midnight votes on crucial issues, pushing bills to the floor of the Legislature without committee and public hearings, arm twisting and political blackmail from the governor, then they had better get used to the opposition voicing their opinions from the balconies, if that be the only way to be heard.

I suggest, Mr. Richard, that it is your image of the MEA that is tarnished. We are no longer the little old schoolmarm of the past, who taught and nurtured the children of our society, and were grateful for whatever crumbs the bureaucracy threw our way.

We are highly educated, professional educators, most of us women, who have joined together in a professional union, and now have economic and political power of the highest level in our state.

It appears that the political and media bureaucracy, mostly male dominated, is so threatened by us that they will stop at nothing to put us back in our place.

The governor's attacks on our collective bargaining rights, guaranteed under a 30-year-old Michigan law, was just the spark that was needed to ignite this powerful union, and we are now standing tall, together with the other unions in our state.

Come November we will see just who shot themselves in the foot, Mr. Richard, the governor and the Republican legislators hiding in his back pocket, or the MEA, the MFT, the AFL-CIO, the UAW, and the Teamsters.

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Livonia Elementary Teacher

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