

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Health Insurance

Every so often I lay claim in this column to my inalienable right of free speech. The right to clamber onto the soapbox and sound off on a subject that's been under my skin just waiting to pop. This time children it's Health Care, in memory of our good friend Bill Crowe.

For some time I've watched our eminent politicians who seem to have constituencies located in another world pass over, around, and under what I deem to be the number one problem in this United States. Solving this problem may be a major lynchpin to setting us back on the course to recapture competitiveness and restore our national health to where we rightfully should be in the world, not 15th or 25th but #1.

Competitiveness. I hardly talk to a businessperson today who doesn't tell me their greatest problem, second only to finding good help is the crushing burden of health insurance. Think of the major companies, Ford, GM, United and Delta Airlines to name a few, who are hobbled by health insurance costs. Yes, new companies are taking their place, but are they offering full coverage? No. Major part of the cost is being thrown back on the worker. At Wilbur Yachts we had to finally go to catastrophic insurance with a five thousand dollar deductible and then our employees still have to chip in a substantial amount each month. To my knowledge there are only two health insurance companies left in Maine. They've found the costs of doing business in Maine too great to make an honest profit.

Employers, free of the health insurance burden, could reinvest in better pay to employees, and in their own infrastructure. Thus, giving this country a stronger competitive advantage in the reality of global economy.

You may have read in the news this past year about the various health organizations, American Medical Assoc., insurance companies, government who got together to formulate various health plans which might be applicable to this country. One of their findings: If we were to pool all the public monies (Medicare, Medicaid, welfare, on and on) now spent on health coupled with modest private payments, we can afford a

comprehensive plan today. With a proactive health plan, one which demands annual checkups, and is geared to keeping us citizens healthy, one which will penalize us if we don't. We could be the envy of the world once again. Let smokers pay their fair share.

Getting back to Washington D.C. AJ and I happened to meet a young couple who were aides to separate senators. I asked what the chances are for a bill on national health insurance. Her answer, "Not good. We feel that the lawyers are the problem."

Lawyers, lawyers. Now I thought to myself, "lawyers" are the reason we hang somewhere near 15th in the world in national healthcare to our citizens and 25th in prenatal care. Sure lawsuits are a huge problem. We're sue-happy in this country. But who has the power for change? Is it not our government and president? These people are living under a rock. By the way, the young lady was 27 years old and writing policy for her senator. Want to bet she has full health benefits? And from whom? Can't help but wonder how many hospital waiting rooms, VA hospitals or Welfare centers she's visited.

To bad we don't have a national referendum similar to what we have in Maine. One geared to at least getting the attention of congress. Our needs seem to forever be forgotten in the milieu of wars, pork projects, foreign aid and tax breaks for the wealthy. I did happen to notice in "Time" magazine, pg. 21, Feb. 13th, Joe Klein's editorial on Bush S.O.U. address, of a more solid undercurrent by labor, business and politicals toward universal coverage. Let's keep fingers crossed.

Picked up an interesting book. "What we've lost", by Graydon Carter, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. A list of what's happened since G.W.B. has been (or not been) our president.

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This recipe from 'Cuisine at Home' Feb. 2006 is for our good friends Gerry and Diane Lynch. Gerry is a connoisseur and lover of great bread pudding.

Chocolate Bread Pudding
Makes one 9" round.

Melt: 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips (12 oz.)
1 cup brown sugar
1 stick unsalted butter cubed

Whisk together, pour over:
2 cups whole or 2% milk
3 eggs
2 tablespoons vanilla extract

2 teaspoons instant espresso powder
1/2 teaspoon table salt

13 slices good white bread stale and
and cut into 1" cubes (1 lb.)

Fold in: Chocolate mixture. Bake for 1 hour in a 9" Springform pan with 1 tablespoon unsalted butter or until center springs back. Serve w/topping or ice cream.

For two neat toppings check out www.cuisineathome.com, February issue. German chocolate sauce or white chocolate cream.

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur