

Business
for
Medicare
for All

**Testimony of Wendell Potter, president of Business for Medicare for All
Before the New York State Assembly and Senate Health Committees
Re: New York Health Act, A.5248/S.3577
Monday, November 25, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. My name is Wendell Potter and I am the President of Business for Medicare for All, a national advocacy group that is educating and organizing the business community across the country in support of fixing our broken health care system. We have nearly 3,000 members now and the organization is growing each day.

Before I was an advocate for health care reform, I spent 20 years as a senior executive at health insurance companies **and saw firsthand how they confuse their customers, dump sick people from their insurance rolls, and propogandize against reform efforts - all so they can satisfy their Wall Street investors.**

When I left my job as head of corporate communications for one of the country's largest insurers, I did not intend to go public as a former insider. However, it recently became abundantly clear to me that the industry's charm offensive — which is the most visible part of duplicitous and well-financed PR and lobbying campaigns — may well shape reform in a way that benefits Wall Street far more than average Americans.

Each year, the industry funnels millions of its policyholders' premiums to big public relations firms that provide talking points to conservative talk show hosts, business groups and politicians. **The PR firms set up front groups, again using your premium dollars and mine, to scare people away from reform.**

What I'm trying to do as I write and speak out against the insurance industry I was a part of for nearly two decades is to inform Americans that when they hear isolated stories of long waiting times to see doctors in Canada and allegations that care in other systems is rationed by "government bureaucrats," - someone associated with the insurance industry wrote the original script.

The industry has been engaging in these kinds of tactics for many years, going back to its successful behind-the-scenes campaign to kill the Clinton reform plan and continuing with the efforts to waterdown and weaken the Affordable Care Act.

This PR campaign against health reform efforts occurs against the backdrop of a health care system that is failing.

Business owners are struggling to provide health insurance to their employees, workers' take-home pay is shrinking as their premiums go up, patients are literally begging for their lives on fundraising platforms like GoFundMe, doctors and hospitals are drowning in paperwork dealing with insurance claims departments, and more than 80 million people lack adequate health insurance. That number is increasing every year. Reform is desperately needed.

Passage of the New York Health Act would be a major step forward in removing financial barriers to health care, controlling costs, and supplying the business community with stability and predictability. This proposal would provide comprehensive plans to all New York residents with no co-pays, no deductibles, and no premiums. This is badly needed because the private, for-profit health insurance system is not interested in maximizing health or controlling costs - they want profits.

According to a new report, half of all New York residents with health insurance delayed or skipped basic care, check-ups, or the purchase of prescription drugs because of the additional financial barriers set up by the for-profit companies that control our premium dollars.

That type of rationing would end with the passage of the New York Health Act.

So the next time you hear someone warning against a "government takeover" of our health care system, or that the creation of a public health plan would send us down the "slippery slope toward socialism," know that someone like I used to write those terms, knowing it might turn many of the very people who would benefit most from meaningful reform into unwitting spokespeople for the industry.

I urge you to pass the legislation before you. Thank you for your time and service to the people of New York. I'd be happy to take any questions you have.

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