

## Editorial

### *Time for a health civil rights law*

Too many people today think that they can, at will, violate the basic rights of their fellow men and women. An example of this, is the attempt to deny medical treatment to the poor, most especially if they are elderly.

We can assume that Newt Gingrich will use the election results giving Republicans a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate as a mandate to dismantle Medicare and Medicaid. However, as foolish Americans will learn soon enough, what is on the line is the right of everyone but the most wealthy to receive decent medical treatment. This is the reality of the increasing dominance of health maintenance organizations (HMOs) in the field of medicine.

Increasingly, the only medical insurance policies available to most Americans, are managed health care plans which give an insurance company the right to determine whether, and to what extent, an individual will receive medical treatment, *regardless of the recommendation of his or her doctor.*

It is becoming apparent, even to those who currently support aspects of the so-called Contract with America, that managed health care is a killer. What we need is a health civil rights law, to guarantee to all Americans the right to top-level medical care, regardless of ability to pay, and regardless of the attempts by insurance companies to cut costs.

Health care civil rights is a major area for legislation, and for judicial intervention. Now, in the state of Pennsylvania, since the passage of Gov. Thomas Ridge's new budget initiative, which denies medical assistance to the needy, patients with life-threatening illnesses are being denied treatment; for example, cancer patients who are without means of payment, have been suspended from chemotherapy.

This is legislated murder, and if House Speaker Gingrich and his supporters have their way, Pennsylvania's example will become the model for the nation. Thus, we are witnessing the opening wedge of the same Nazi-like policy which condemned those whom the Nazis defined to be useless eaters, to slave labor camps and,

ultimately, gas chambers.

While denying necessary medical treatment to the poor is a clear example of the Hitler model, managed health care is only a more subtle form of the same policy. Here, cost-benefit analysis is used to justify denial of certain medical treatments to the sick, even if they are fully insured.

Physicians are being prevented from delivering the care patients need, without first getting approval from bureaucrats within the hierarchy of insurance companies. Doctors have to work within rules which are set by HMOs and insurance companies, and that means discouraging patients from requesting specialist care.

Hospitals and emergency clinics are being shut down. Qualified nurses are being replaced by unskilled personnel, and there are cutbacks in laboratory work. People will die at an increased rate because of what is happening in the health care field. We can look with horror at the British example, where kidney dialysis for people with renal failure is routinely denied to the elderly.

Moves to privatize U.S. Medicare and Medicaid, and all public health facilities, will create a similar nightmare in the United States.

We need to protect the right to life of every man, woman, and child—which means the right to medical treatment. Things have already deteriorated to the point where we need the passage of health civil rights law, in order to guarantee that an insurance company cannot kill you or a member of your family, in order to improve its profit statement. And, obviously, such a law must also guarantee the right of those too poor to purchase insurance, a right to medical care as well.

Such a law must be passed by Congress. This is clearly not only a federal responsibility, but no state or local government can be permitted to deny treatment to the needy, nor can any managed health care facility be allowed to impose standards of profitability, rather than medical standards, in defining how a patient shall be treated.