

by living in denial or tolerating a repressed anxiety. For example, many young people believe that they will never get seriously ill. When they get sick, or have an accident, denial gets pushed away by reality. Often, they emotionally cope with their situation by embracing the role of the victim. Even if one consciously realizes the liability of being uninsured, the financial consequences of a major illness are too overwhelming for many to think about. This can create a persistent, low-grade anxiety that is never verbalized. All of these dynamics can occur in addition to the medical condition itself.

Critics usually don't directly say that universal health care is a bad goal for Maine. It's the method that they have a problem with. Some believe that individuals and markets should control how health-care dollars are spent, not government. For example, the Maine Heritage Policy Center believes that citizens can do better by putting their money into a health savings account or even by purchasing cheaper health insurance outside of Maine.

Others believe that Maine simply cannot afford Dirigo now. With a huge state budget deficit, Augusta should be thinking about ways to spend

less money, not more. Maine received \$53 million in federal money last year that was used for start-up costs for the program. However, that money will not be available in the future. The program is bound to need additional money before the promised cost-savings begin to appear.

Moreover, there is talk that the Bush administration wants to "reform" Medicaid. Medicaid is the federal-state program designed to provide health insurance to the disabled and poor. "Reforming" Medicaid might translate into less federal money for Maine,

given the need to reduce the record federal budget deficit. If there is less federal money, there may need to be more state money.

Many of these critiques are valid and should be carefully considered when Dirigo gets debated this legislative session. For example, the proper mix of state and federal money, and the monthly costs and discount eligibility rules of the various plans are important details that need to be analyzed. However, the core principle of universal coverage should not be forgotten.

What underlying assump-

tion supports this core principle? That health care is a right and not a privilege. It is this premise that gives Dirigo Choice its logic and strength. Supporters should continually refer back to this basic notion for sustenance when the budget battles begin in earnest later this winter. They should also be prepared to honestly talk about what responsibilities go along with that right.

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