

Statement by William J. Spring
on behalf of the Committee for Health Care for Massachusetts and
House bill 4444, a proposed Constitutional Amendment
to provide AFFORDABLE HEALTH INSURANCE FOR ALL

Legislative hearing 10 A.M. Tuesday, April 6, 2004
Gardner Auditorium
Massachusetts State House

It is important to begin by identifying myself as a private citizen speaking only for myself. I am the chairman of the Youth Committee of the Mass. Work force Investment Board and have been engaged in youth (and adult) employment and education efforts in this state at least since 1981, but today I am not testifying in any official capacity.

Information provided by the Committee for Health Care for Mass. states "the rate of uninsurance is highest for young adults aged 19-29 standing at 17.5%. 19 is the age at which young people, not enrolled in full time education are routinely dropped from the health insurance plans provided their parents by employers. The decade of the 20s in the lives of young people are the years of family formation, childbirth, and infancy. Years when effective health care is essential for young parents, families and the well being of the state's population. The term "Commonwealth" was not coined in Massachusetts. It was used in the 17th century when, in 1653, Oliver Cromwell was titled "Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland during the Puritan revolution John Winthrop brought the idea that each citizen was a part of a common life with many other Puritan civil ideas to the Bay Colony.

Social insurance against unemployment on a national scale was one supported by as conservative a figure as Chancellor Otto Von Bismark in late 19th century Germany. In 1932 Wisconsin was the first American state to vote for a state Unemployment Insurance system three years before the concept was established in Federal law by the Roosevelt administration and the Congress as part of the 1935 Social Security Act. In this country the concept of Health Insurance has been long debated. President Truman proposed such a system in 1948, during the Post World War Two Period when so many of our European allies were establishing such systems through the collaboration of Business and Labor, the "social partners" (to use the OECD term).

In 1961 The Nation Debate Tournament Topic was:
: "THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD ADOPT A PROGRAM OF COMPULSORY HEALTH INSURANCE FOR ALL CITIZENS."

The championship round, held that year at West Point, was won by Harvard University's team, led by Laurence Tribe, now a well known professor of constitutional law on the Harvard Law School faculty.

In my ten years on the staff of U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson (D.Wis.) I learned that a legislative body is well designed to consider contentious issues, such as health insurance, gather relevant information, debate, decide and establish a structure of implementation as would be required by this proposed Constitutional Amendment. If the health system is to enjoy sustained popular support it is necessary for bipartisan agreement be reached at the inception through a legislative process.