

*Remarks by LCC President Brent Knight
House Public Employee Health Care Reform Committee
November 19, 2009*

Good morning. I am Brent Knight, president of Lansing Community College, and this is my colleague Dr. Rashid Robinson.

I am here on my own. I wrote my remarks. I assume that it would have been better for me personally to avoid coming here today. My testimony is probably inconsistent with the perspective of some employee groups at the college where I work. But this is not about me. I am here on matters of principle, matters of conscience, matters of conviction.

I spent my youth in Bay City, Michigan. My mother was a teacher in Essexville. Education was an important value in our household. I learned about the fundamental principles which created what is today, the Great State of Michigan.

Michigan has a long tradition of leadership in important matters for the public good. Over time, Michigan has benefited from great leaders. Philip Hart was referred to as the conscience of the United States Senate, respected by all. Arthur Vandenberg believed in universal equality and was very involved in causes like famine relief. I mention these senators because they, and many like them, shaped the policies and values of Michigan.

I have lived and worked in other states, so I have perspective. I am proud to be a Michigander. To me, Michigan values equality, hard work, respect, fairness and, above all, the greater good. Those and other attributes make Michigan a great and proud state.

I appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today on the subject of health care reform for public sector employees.

Clearly, all public institutions, and the people we serve, have been negatively affected by the worst economic crisis in many years. At LCC, our health care costs increased 14% this fiscal year, and are projected to rise 14%, or \$1.1 million, next year. We are making every effort to reduce costs wherever possible without negatively impacting our instructional offerings,

but the outlook is not good and we must continue to re-examine every aspect of how we operate.

So, it is no surprise that during these challenging times, the idea of saving money through health care reform has great appeal. The idea of saving almost \$1 billion has even more appeal. Especially when those savings could be used to create jobs, educate our children and workforce, and help us manage our deficit. All of us in the public sector must adjust our spending and support innovative, equitable and reasonable strategies to reduce costs.

Michigan became a great state because of the many people who came before us and fought for policies that contributed to the greater good. As we all struggle to adapt to a changing state and national economy, we must *not* lose sight of the greater good.

Each month I visit a Walgreens Pharmacy on Saginaw and Creyts Road to refill my Mevacor prescription, one of the statins. I stand in line along with other customers from all walks of life. I enjoy the same health care benefits as all other employees at Lansing Community College. My co pay is \$2. Again, I am usually in a line with other customers. My conscience bothers me every time I watch a person in front of me dig in their wallet, grimace and pay considerably more than I do for their prescription.

Are we contributing to the greater good when, I as a public employee, have a \$2 co-pay for my prescription when working men and women in the private sector pay considerably more and those without insurance must pay the full cost?

Are we contributing to the greater good when we agree to maintain or even increase health benefits every year even if it means some people will lose their jobs and academic programs will disappear?

Are we contributing to the greater good when, across the state, each and every year, employees of hundreds of units of government will spend countless hours of their work time in committees, at the table, negotiating health care coverage issues, for every school district, every college, every municipality? The lost time and the direct costs associated with this effort is something that we cannot afford when we are engaged in staffing cuts across the board.

We *are* contributing to the greater good when we do our duty, propose innovative solutions, and make the difficult decisions that are critical in managing the economic challenges ahead and building upon Michigan's legacy of progress and opportunity for all.

I commend the sponsors of this legislation for their leadership in bringing this issue of health care cost containment to the forefront.

Again, the biggest benefit is the nearly \$1 billion that can be invested in creating Michigan jobs and educating Michigan's children. There is no greater nor more important benefit.

In my opinion, little money will be saved if this bill is compromised and watered down. In my personal opinion, all public employees should have one level of health insurance. Furthermore, the health insurance coverage of public employees should be something that the State of Michigan can afford with new economic realities. Public employees should have coverage which is no better than coverage that is customary in the private sector.

Thank you.

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