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Care crisis: Medicare for all

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

CHARLESTON, W.Va.

Health care should be a human right for all people. Medical insurance should be universal, covering everyone. It should be operated by government, the only sector with enough power to curb runaway trillion-dollar costs. Insurance firms and medical corporations shouldn't get rich from sickness, their executives pocketing millions per year. U.S. employers shouldn't be forced to spend more than \$7,000 per employee per year for health insurance.

Most modern democracies have nationalized "single-payer" health systems guaranteeing care for all at moderate cost -- but America shamefully clings to for-profit medicine, and the U.S. system is a disaster.

The entire March 4 Time magazine is devoted to America's dilemma, in a cover story titled "Why Medical Bills Are Killing Us." The 25,000-word study says:

"In the United States, people spend almost 20 percent of the gross domestic product on health care, compared with about half that in most developed countries. Yet in every measurable way, the results our health care system produces are no better and often worse than the outcomes in those countries We're likely to spend \$2.8 trillion this year on health care"

"Why exactly are the bills so high? What are the reasons, good or bad, that cancer means a half-million or million-dollar tab? Why should a trip to the emergency room for chest pains that turn out to be indigestion bring a bill that can exceed the cost of a semester of college? ... Why does simple lab work done during a few days in a hospital cost more than a car?"

The long report describes families who are devastated by colossal medical bills. And it describes sky-high profiteering by medical executives. The CEO of Medtronic electronic device firm was paid \$25 million in 2012 -- and hospital administrators grab up to \$5 million yearly.

It described a blue-collar Oklahoma man who suffered back pain, and a Catholic charity hospital billed him \$86,951 for a one-day visit to install an electronic nerve interceptor. The hospital's administrator is paid \$1.9 million per year.

Surprisingly, Time concludes that Medicare, America's chief "socialized medicine" system, is the best cure for skyrocketing costs, because it clamps tight controls on medical bills. And its bureaucracy is super-frugal. Medicare spends just \$3.80 each to process more than 1 billion claims per year -- while Aetna insurance spends \$30 to process each claim. Commercial insurers waste a lot of money trying to foist bills onto someone else.

For generations, Democrats in Washington have sought to bring low-cost universal health care to America. President Obama's landmark 2010 reform was a major step. Maybe the wisest course would be to expand Medicare until it covers every American.