

## Healthcare insurance cost soars

Written by Judge Greg Mathis  
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17 percent of the nation's economy goes toward healthcare costs; far more than in any other industrialized nation. Yet, 50 million Americans are currently without health insurance. For those fortunate enough to be covered, the high premiums and deductibles make a serious dent in their household budget. Companies are paying less for employee healthcare while workers are coming out of pocket more often, sometimes for fewer services. A medical emergency can often leave a family financially drained. In fact, a large percentage of those who file bankruptcy do so because of mounting healthcare bills. There is a clear and urgent need for healthcare reform. The system is broken. It is time that is fixed.

According to a recent study by the Kaiser Foundation, healthcare insurance premiums for families have increased 113 percent over the last ten years. The group, a private non-profit that focuses its work on the major health care issues facing the U.S., also found that the general inflation rate increased by only 28 percent over the same period. The average cost of a family policy offered by employers rose 5 percent while the average wage only increased 3 percent. Some companies are eliminating health benefits to its employee's altogether; between 2000 and 2008, the total percentage of U.S. companies offering health insurance to its workers dropped 6 percent. Small businesses, which drive the nation's economy, are most like to drop coverage, citing rising insurance costs.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton and then First Lady Hillary Clinton tried to reform America's healthcare system. Then, America spent more than \$900 billion each year on health care. That reform never came to pass and the country continued on with the same ineffective system. Thanks to government's inaction, we are spending more on healthcare – an expected \$2.6 trillion this year – and more people are finding themselves uninsured.

When there is no competition, health insurance companies have free reign to increase prices, hurting millions of people, most of whom earn modest incomes, in the process. Those days are over.

Healthcare companies should be required to compete with a public insurance company or co-op to ensure both companies that provide insurance to workers and the workers themselves are getting the best possible prices. As we gear up for the fall, and Congress considers sweeping healthcare legislation, there will be many more public debates on the pros and cons of healthcare reform. It is important to remember that, for far too long, Americans have been falling into debt to pay their medical bills while insurance companies continue to fatten their bottom line. We all deserve better.

Judge Greg Mathis became the youngest judge in Michigan's history and was elected a Superior Court Judge for Michigan's 36th District. He has been called upon as a regular contributor to national television programs, including "Larry King Live," "Politically Incorrect," CNN's "Talk Back Live," "Showbiz Tonight" and "Extra" to discuss his opinions on complex issues of the day, such as national security, unique sentencing, affirmative action and celebrity scandals. He also offers his take on high-profile legal cases.