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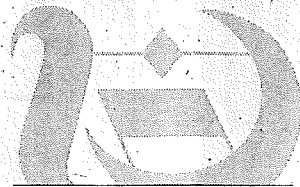
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The Troubling State of Americans' Health

TO THE EDITOR:

I applaud the excellent news article about the National Research Council/Institute of Medicine report revealing that, across most health indicators and age groups, people in the United States have shorter lives and experience more illness than people in other affluent countries ("For Americans Under 50, Stark Findings on Health," Jan. 10).

As a member of the panel that produced the report, I hope that wide awareness of these disturbing findings will lead to reflection and public debate about what we as a nation need to do to turn this dismal situation around.

I also wish to add a point not noted in the article: that the United States' "health disadvantage" is seen even when examining whites and high-income people alone. Minorities and the poor do have worse health and shorter lives, but our panel concluded that the problems producing the American health disadvantage affect all Americans adversely.

Perhaps awareness of that will amplify the political will to address the issues.

PAULA BRAVEMAN

San Francisco, Jan. 10, 2013

The writer is a professor of family and community medicine and director of the Center on Social Disparities in Health at the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine.

TO THE EDITOR:

I've read few articles in The Times that have hit me with such force. I'd be less disturbed if I thought it inevitable that the report would prompt a governmental response like: "Thank goodness we've found out just how bad things are. We'll fix this starting immediately." But I doubt that will happen, no matter how solid the report's scientific basis.

For I don't think it's true, as a lead author of the report is quoted as saying, that the mess we're in "is not the product of a particular administration or political party." One of our parties has in fact long championed equal access to health care for all, and one has fought that with reliable consistency. Why pretend otherwise?

Politics is truly at fault for the fact that the United States is now among the least healthy of all the developed nations of the world.

JERL SURRETT

New York, Jan. 10, 2013

TO THE EDITOR:

This report by a panel of experts should be a wake-up call. The high death rate among Americans under 50, perhaps due to easy access to guns, lack of health insurance, high rates of alcohol and drug abuse, and other potential

causes, is sobering.

The reflexive tendency of Americans to ignore public health standards and to resist government intervention in health care is like the petulant child who says no simply because it is the opposite of what the parent is seeking. As a society, we waste enormous amounts of human potential because of our worship of freedom.

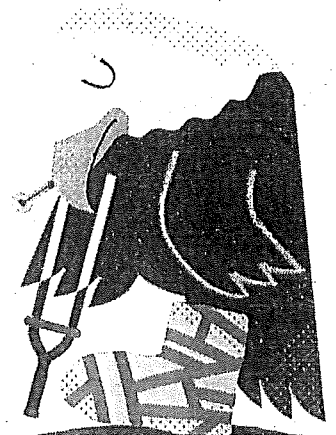
This report should encourage us to promote programs that protect vulnerable populations, such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and universal health insurance, and to discourage practices that put us in greater danger. This would help protect our greatest asset — our people.

EDWIN ANDREWS

Malden, Mass., Jan. 10, 2013

TO THE EDITOR:

While reading "For Americans Under 50, Stark Findings on Health," I was struck by the chart illustrating differences in life expectancy between older and younger Americans. The lower probability of surviving to age 50 in the United States compared with other countries is alarming, but we need to pay attention



NICK ILUZADA

to the good news that life expectancy is relatively high for older Americans.

According to the Census Bureau, over 13 percent of the American population is over 65. By 2030, that number will rise to nearly 20 percent of the population, with over 2 percent of the population over 85. What we don't want and can't afford are millions of older people with chronic disease. Shouldn't we then investigate why those Americans who reach age 85 enjoy such exceptional longevity? This kind of biomedical research will ensure that as we grow older, we will live healthier longer.

STEPHANIE LEDERMAN

Executive Director, The American Federation for Aging Research
New York, Jan. 10, 2013