

Good Morning Chairman Waxman and Members of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Thank you for inviting me to testify on health care, a vital issue of utmost importance to all Americans, especially as you, the nation's leaders, consider reforming the health care system in this country.

My name is Shona Holmes and I am a Canadian citizen but I am eternally grateful to Americans for their health care system. I feel honored to be a voice of experience, as I have experienced treatment from both sides of our borders. If I had relied on my own government-run health care system in Canada, I would not be sitting here before you today. At the very best, I would be blind and the very worst I would be dead.

In 2005 I started to have crushing headaches and insomnia. I always felt on edge and my adrenaline levels were through the roof. My eyesight was also severely worsening. Although 5 million unfortunate people in Canada are without a family doctor, thankfully I had one and was able to make an appointment to see my primary care physician, who referred me to two different specialists. The Canadian government, which runs a dangerous monopoly of the health care system in our country, ultimately offered me the only option of a four-month wait time to see a neurologist and a six-month wait time to see an endocrinologist. As my health worsened, I knew there was no possible way I could wait that long. I have a husband, a family and I am self-employed. How could I wait that long for the care I so desperately needed? How could I allow my government to gamble with my health?

I tried to expedite the specialist appointment, but due to the shortages of specialists, the capping of our doctors' wages and restrictions on doctors' work hours, and the incredibly long wait lists that are already in place, I had no options.

Our health care system is a single-payer system, which means there are no options for alternative avenues of care. In fact, to exercise the right to see a doctor outside of my government-run insurance in my own country is in fact illegal. I had to leave the country in order to use any resources that I could scrape together in order to get diagnosed. What started many years ago as a seemingly compassionate move in government to treat all equally and fairly by providing the same medical coverage for everyone has in fact turned into a nightmare of everyone suffering equally. Now we have limited resources and funds to offer timely treatment to our citizens. A system like this starts to crack under pressure, and special treatment is ultimately given to those who have the contacts and resources to jump the line for treatment, or for someone like myself, an average Canadian citizen, forced to go to another country for care.

My family and I decided to contact the Mayo Clinic in Arizona. We got an appointment immediately and I flew alone to Phoenix, 2,000 miles from my home outside of Toronto. Within a week, the doctors at the Mayo Clinic diagnosed me with a brain tumor, pressing on my optic chiasm causing the rapid vision loss. I had to have it removed within six weeks or my vision would continue to deteriorate and I would lose my sight. This was the tip of the iceberg of treatment that I would need to seek; however, it was the most crucial.

I flew back to Canada, diagnosis in hand, and attempted to have the surgery under my government-run health care plan. The government refused to do the surgery within the six-week time frame. I was devastated. My government had failed to take care of its own citizen. The country that had been known for being kind and compassionate was showing its true colors. I was quickly educated through a series of hard knocks about how much trouble single-payer health care could cause.

Three weeks after my diagnosis and unable to expedite the surgery in Canada, my husband bumped up hours in a second job, took out a second mortgage on our home, borrowed from family and friends, and rallied all of our financial resources so we could cover the \$100,000 worth of expenses for my surgery and we flew back to Arizona so the doctors at the Mayo Clinic could remove my tumor. Ironically at that time a second surgery was strongly recommended by the Mayo clinic. I required a second surgery to remove my adrenal gland. I returned to Canada and got back in line. I am here to report that surgery was done in Canada, but three years later. I will never know the amount of irreversible tissue damage that such wait times have caused. I will never get back the time, money, and life I dedicated to the fight to get the basic treatment that I was not only promised by my government, but was ordered by my government. I will never forget the experience of treatment in a facility suffering so badly from government funding shortages in staff and resources that even a pillow case on my bed was not to be found.

I know that the American health care system is not perfect, but again, I credit the system for saving my life. It is because of the choices available here in this country that I was able to receive the immediate care I needed. We as Canadians have one insurance company – the

government. No option. Can't choose another company, can't supplement with after-tax dollars to purchase extra care. We can purchase health insurance for our pets, but not our children.

In Canada, I have very few rights as a patient. Patients there have to fight for the very basic services and care, much less any kind of specialized care. I am here today not only to tell you my own story but also to ask you, as leaders of this great country, not to destroy American health care but to keep in place the options that all Americans have for acquiring health care. Where would we Canadians go if the American health care system becomes like Canada's? I could spend hours with stories from others from both minor to tragic, but my message is the same: I am not alone in my huge disappointment with government-controlled health care.

The neighborly thing I felt I could do was to open the communication between both your citizens and ours to the myths that many of us believe about each other's health care situation. Our health care is not free. In fact I would argue that the cost is greater than the tax we pay, each and every citizen, toward this care. The costs are loss of quality of life while living with pain, discomfort or just fear of the unknown, and waiting on lists for diagnostic testing. The costs to employers or self-employed people: waiting for employees to be treated and be well enough to work. Medications are something Canadians struggle to pay for as well – these are NOT covered under our government-run health care plan. We pay the costs of local ERs closing, losing a wealth of talented doctors to other countries because they don't have the resources to do the job they were trained to do. We have rationing of services and treatments and the fear of living without a safety net.

I am so grateful to the doctors at the Mayo Clinic and to the American health care system. It is for this reason that I am here today, sitting before you to tell my story. I am expecting my first grandchild this fall, and I am certain that if my fate was left in the hands of the Canadian government, I would not be here to share that joy.

Thank you.