

1. INTRODUCTION:

Good afternoon. My name is Fred Walker. I am the owner and operator of St. Petersburg Glass and Mirror in St. Petersburg, Florida. We fabricate and install flat glass and aluminum products for the construction, remodeling and emergency recovery industries.

2. HISTORY:

I founded the company in 1993 with 2 credit cards, some financial support from family and a lot of help from my wife. Sixteen years later I feel lucky to be a survivor of the current economic disaster in our community.

3. HEALTH PLANS AND MY BUSINESS:

From day one I felt that each employee should have the option to be included in a health insurance plan. Over the years we learned the plans are many. You have to shop for a new one every year to help avoid escalating costs, pre-existing conditions are never covered and each employee is a unique case. As the cost has risen the financial burden our company can bear has been reduced. We currently pay 50% of our policy for each employee. Percentages have changed as the policies and premiums have risen.

4. ECONOMIC DOWNTURN AND MINDY'S STORY:

I am here today because of the effect the economic downturn has had on my business and consequently my ability to provide a healthcare program for my employees. 2007 and early 2008 were boom years for St. Petersburg Glass and Mirror. The housing boom was followed by a commercial building boom. I had 10 glaziers on staff, an assistant manager and a secretary. Every day was busy and we sometimes had more work than we could handle. By late summer 2008 work

started slowing down and I saw the economic decline coming. I started laying off workers that September and by February 2009 it looked like I might have to drop our health insurance program. I mentioned that one day to my secretary, Mindy, and she immediately made an appointment to have a breast exam. The check up she had been avoiding was breast cancer. I made decision to keep our health insurance program even though business continued to collapse. Mindy went into treatment and has fared well. However, our options are limited now as she has been refused a quote because of pre-existing conditions until cancer free for 10 years. Please also note that I had a sudden bout of seizures from May 2008 to November 2008 which included several days in the hospital and our recent quote did not exclude me. Apparently I am a lower risk.

5. FUTURE ST. PETERSBURG GLASS AND MIRROR HEALTH PLANS:

We have been operating since June with a staff of four. Myself, Mindy in the office and two glaziers. Everyone takes voluntary time off when there is no work. Gross income is roughly one third of what it should be with a workforce that size. Mindy's treatment is over for now and IF she can find another option I will go on my wife's policy soon. Re-building the company appears to be months or even years away.

6. INPUT FROM OTHERS:

I thought it my duty to ask friends, family and mentors their opinion on this issue as I represent them, as well. I have paraphrased some of their responses:

Jim Maxheimer – Retired Accountant - U.S. government should butt out. Whatever they pass will be written in detail by somebody else – basic flaw in the system.

Harry Green – Retired, – Mensa genius- "It's too late. Total collapse is imminent.

John Wallace – General Contractor – Wallace and Associates, “the bill passed in the Senate last week requiring businesses to provide health insurance will crush small business.”

Jack Grayson – Owner of Seminole Realty and my cousin who looks after me like a brother told an unheard story about the 13 year battle his departed wife, Peggy had with cancer. And I quote “The last few years our co-pays were 3-4 thousand dollars a month and we had good insurance! What do the less fortunate do?” Peggy passed in 2000. Jack says we have to help those who can’t afford the proper care.

Lance – Lance’s Moving Company – Customer - Lance related the story that his wife had kissed their grandson on the eye when he was a baby. She had a cold sore and accidentally gave him herpes simplex in his eye. There is no medical insurance available because of the pre-existing conditions. Lance has spent his life savings and is out of options. The boy is six years old.

Bob Howes – My friend and keyboard player- delivers car paint two days a week and plays music for money as much as he can to survive. Bob has an ongoing battle with skin cancer and has run out of options for treatment. He has conceded death within a few years.

Bill Walker – my cousin who is an RN and sells pacemakers for St. Jude medical CRMD division. Bill travels a lot and likes the French and the Canadian systems.

Most of my middle aged, right wing buddies who live week to week and could never afford health insurance. Their clock is ticking and they don’t have a plan.

Almost all of my friends who own small businesses have suspended holiday and vacation pay as well as any health benefits because of the economic downturn.

Most of us use chiropractors, dentists, optomologists and counselors as well as medical doctors. These people are as educated and vital to our welfare as doctors but not covered under most medical plans.

A friend related a story about a local anesthesiologist who specializes in cardio-pediatric care. His clinic had liability insurance, the hospital he worked out of had liability insurance, but his annual premium for personal liability is \$250,000 per year. That is triple liability insurance.

Finally, my wife, Jane Walker, Director of Daystar Life Center in St. Petersburg who takes care of the least fortunate of us every day. “There are many people who choose between food, medication and healthcare for their loved ones every day. Something has to be done. We live in the greatest nation in the world and have the resources. This is an issue about people – not politics – not money – People!”

7. SOLUTIONS:

I would like to note that while polling my friends and family on October 15 I finally found somebody who was very happy with their healthcare. Pete and Pat Lamb are dear family friends and over 70 years old. Their combination of Medicare and co-insurance has provided well for them. Perhaps a starting point?