

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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The renewal of life in spring encourages us to hope for growth and change in our collective lives. One place where such change would be welcome is in the form of progressive policies promoting social justice in the United States. While the national and geopolitical climate this spring may appear to blanket any prospect of this, careful observers can notice subtle indications of dramatic shifts in the cultural and political landscape.

Our current preoccupation with the war in Iraq and Presidential politics seems to consume our national energy; yet a paradigm shift in the way health care is delivered in the United States is on the horizon. There is no question that a long awaited national policy on health care will be enacted in the next few years. The calls for reform of the health care system have come from some unlikely quarters—small businesses and large corporations, large labor unions, and conservative politicians—all of whom recognize the unsupportable costs of our current profit based system. Unhappiness with the cost and limited access of our hodgepodge of health care delivery systems, along with discontent over the high cost of pharmaceuticals, has continued to percolate through new groups emerging as constituencies for a national policy change. This widespread deep dissatisfaction, the prerequisite for significant social change, insures that most of us will witness the emergence of this policy in our lifetimes.

The federal budget deficit appears, on the surface, to threaten the viability of Social Security and Medicare. The fact is that both of these programs will likely be enhanced and strengthened over the next five years, as the baby boomers join the powerful aging lobby. Their force cannot be overestimated. With the power of numbers and financial means, those

who have had the economic and social privilege to forge the cultural and political agenda for much of their lives will not stand by and see these benefits attenuated. Instead, baby boomers will join the call for national health insurance when their physical limitations and frailties emerge in a Medicare-threatened political environment. Social Security will not be destroyed or reduced; instead policies to insure income support for aging Americans will be given new life by the political will and sense of entitlement of this generation.

The dramatic surge of recognition of the right of gays and lesbians to marry rests on the widespread acceptance in the United States of the right of persons to live according to their sexual orientation. This is a profound cultural change, signaling an opening of American culture similar to that represented by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. This shift toward equality has great meaning for all oppressed groups, for it suggests that a paradigm of intolerance has been overturned, and, as with the Civil Rights movement, other progressive social changes are sure to follow.

Social workers and others committed to progressive social change can be heartened to know that dark times in this country's past have been followed by the most profound social transformations. The New Deal was born from the Depression, the Civil Rights Movement was forged in the midst of a torpid domestic complacency, and the War on Poverty was begun during the worst days of Cold War tension. Similarly, the current economic downturn and anguish of war are sure to be followed by policies of renewal.

These too are dark days, but Spring promises us better days ahead.

