



Connecticut Union Heads Agree To Revolutionary Health Reform

By [Denis Horgan](#) | Last updated May 17, 2011, 12:55 pm

Talk about making lemonade! In an enormously significant development, a handful of government officials and union leaders around the negotiating table have accomplished what politicians, civic leaders and health authorities have failed to do over the long years: They're putting the money where the mouth is on health care.

We're not looking at just refinements on paying for health care but actually working to reduce the need for it — and making people healthier at the same time.

Those of us who have endured college tuition piracy and the awful explosion of health care costs are less interested in making it easier to pay in the second place than we are in reducing the damn costs in the first place. Negotiating over the state's budget problems, workers and officials have taken a huge step in exactly the right direction.

Fifty-thousand state families and tens of thousands more retirees will now be required to take steps to become more healthy — or pay the price. The negotiators who struck the huge deal to wring pay freezes, fees and jobs out of the state's budget have also agreed to impose — impose! — [Value Based Health Care](#) on the large workforce.

Employees *must* sign a commitment to have annual check-ups and take lifestyle and medical steps to improve their health. If they don't they will be whacked with a large fine — \$100 a month for those refusing to play ball, for one thing. There are other steps to reduce waste and redirect care to physicians from more expensive emergency room services but this approach gets ahead of the problem rather than trying to mend it afterward.

For decades everyone's known that preventative medicine should save money. Keep people healthy and they won't need ever-more-expensive health care. A few companies have moved in that direction but none with the numbers and clout as the entire state workforce and retiree corps. The very idea of prevention seemed to be ridiculed by forces of greed who wanted no tinkering with a system that enriches them on the misfortune of others. That's changing.

The rules will be simple. Get annual exams. Take your meds. Clean-up your lifestyle — or pay the difference. With state workers being required to pay a larger portion of their fees — the equivalent of six full days pay — new levies would hurt even more.

So the new approach compels people to take the common-sense steps that will lead to a healthier 55,000 slice of the state, all their family members and the many retired workers, too.

This is no pie-in-the-sky play-acting at social engineering. It just makes sense. Healthy people do not run up the bills. The insurance companies get to collect the premiums but should see less or smaller payouts. The medical system has healthier people to deal with and, thus, more resources to focus on where the special needs and opportunities exists. The budget deficit goes down. Win. Win. Win.

It puts the burden of sustaining good health more squarely on the individual but strengthens the system to deal with those inevitable circumstances when health care is required.

This is a very good idea and a very good plan — within a framework of hard-earned compromise and give-back, a climate where progress is seldom seen.

Interestingly, it took mature and intelligent negotiations between workers and bosses to pull this off for the vast state employee system. This could never be legislated past the bureaucrats. This could not grow out of the academics and social planners. Each side recognizes the emergency on financing and had the resolve to turn to a system that could help — help lower costs while, more important, increasing the health of our neighbors.

Tip your hat to these guys. they have pulled off an amazing accomplishment.