



GREATER WASHINGTON ALLIES IN RECONCILIATION

An Interfaith Antiracism Alliance

Testimony to Muslim-American Taskforce on Civil Rights & Health Care

***by Dr. Louisa L. Davis, Cofounder & Outreach Coordinator, GWAIR
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I am here today as an interfaith religious leader steeped in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but I am speaking more specifically as a Christian bio-ethicist and from my core commitment as a white antiracist ally for social justice and health care justice, and ultimately for a powerfully good and healthy multi-ethnic America.

As a Euro-American or white antiracist ally, I know in my heart that despite all the services, opportunities, and access to power or people in positions of power who mostly look like me which I have enjoyed in this great country--many honestly unintentionally, this is not the reality of most people of color. I also know that I will never fully know the joy of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all" until our government, that is charged with upholding and embodying those words, has the courage to insure the health and opportunity for well-being of all my sisters and brothers. These words will have little truth to them until those of us who have so much more access to resources and power decide that their needs are as important as our needs, that their needs matter as much as do the needs of politically dominant middle-class white Christians like me—the needs we all share for safety, for choice, for effectiveness and for sustainability, or for simply being able to make a living.

I am mindful that many, many words have been spoken about this issue, about how America finances our health care and occasionally even about who benefits most from the system as it is, a "system" of largely unregulated private health "insurers" who insure great profit but few people of color.

I am mindful that the noise-level and anger and fear level of this discussion has been quite remarkable, and real, and yet I thank President Obama for somehow trusting the American people to work it out--together. Toward this end, I hope to offer just one more spiritual resource, taught perhaps best by the Jewish theologian, Elie Weisel, in the face of the Holocaust, but at the core of all our religious traditions.

I ask you, good people, to listen to the SILENCE behind all these words, all this fear and all this hope. Listen to the silence of those who cannot afford Washington Post ads or to wine and dine those in power. Listen to the

forbearing Black women on my old Washington Hospital Center orthopedic ward who are losing feet and legs everyday from lifetimes of under-treated diabetes and over-worked domestic service. Listen to those who cannot afford to challenge their employers stripping them of health care benefits. Listen to those whose insurers, if they are lucky to have one, reject care with unreasonable limits. Listen to the silence of children who have missed schooling, sports and work opportunities because they cannot afford the vaccinations of common preventive health care.

As a white ally, with many words and oh-so-many ideas, I have learned that my silence can be leveling when it opens space for others to be heard, when it allows other to lead on this great new bus we call 21st century civil society.

But my silence, our silence, can also be damning. I beg you, please, to listen to the silence. For there you will find your soul, your outrage at injustice, and maybe even your God.

I pray that this Congress and Senate will have the courage to speak up for those who have been silenced, sickened and shackled by our sinful human self-interest and indifference.

I know in my heart that I and we will never have moral, spiritual OR political integrity until our sisters and brothers of color are no longer disproportionately tracked into emergency rooms across this land for health care that comes... too little and too late, after they are marked, even before birth, by "the long heavy chain" of racial-ethnic disrespect. The price they pay for white fear of change and white indifference is environmentally toxic housing, schools, unemployment lines and crowded prisons, as well as increasing poverty, illness and hopelessness at levels we dreamed of overcoming years ago. At levels dangerous to us all.

Our US Military and our US Medicare systems are remarkable symbols of what America can both do and be when we get our words and our actions together. When we are willing to speak up and stand up for those who are silenced in this country and across the world, we are truly serving our multiracial country.

In the next few weeks, we will either see progress in public options for health care or we will see just more "insurance care" in Congress. May we stand up and speak up NOW for our common dream of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Thank you and God for this historic opportunity.

Greater Washington Allies in Reconciliation is an evolving interfaith, antiracism alliance, committed to working regionally for racial-ethnic equity by developing understanding of racial-ethnic disparities and systemic injustice, sharing spiritual resources and antiracist practices, and organizing a powerful movement for racial justice, reconciliation and inclusive community. For more information, see www.gwair.org or email: louisaldavis@verizon.net