

Lower health care costs are essential for region to compete globally

BY JIM KURTZ, *for SBT*

Our manufacturing sector is working very hard to remain competitive as they are faced with global challenges. They have a true sense of urgency. But many others, outside of manufacturing, working in the service sector, may not see the shift of jobs from back-end banking, insurance, accounting and even radiology going to India. One dentist reported sending his crown work to an off-shore lab (with excellent results) to reduce costs.

As a nation, we have built wealth. We have many good jobs in the U.S. As a result, many people have become complacent, have a sense of entitlement or unaware of the coming global challenges.

Many other countries have a strong sense of urgency. Their survival depends on it. Many of my friends around the world see us as a wealthy nation, basically good people, but very wasteful and not paying attention to other nations.

It has only been 61 years after World War II ended. We have built great wealth with little global competition. As we wanted more and increased our overall wealth, we have priced ourselves out of the global market in many areas.

We must now reduce costs, look for ways to exchange and develop business internationally, remain alert to nations around us, continue to be creative and innovative, and not rest on our past achievements. We need to develop a true

sense of urgency.

Of the 6.3 billion people in the world, the U.S. only has the 0.3. There are another 6 billion people that want what we have and many of them are working very hard to take it from us. We can't afford to be complacent.

Health care costs in southeastern Wisconsin are still nearly the highest in the nation. Since we are in a globally competitive world and have a true desire to become as lean as possible, there is a push from the non-medical business community for transparency in pricing for non-emergency hospital and related medical services.

With informed consumers, and employers educating employees through presentations or in newsletters, cost trans-

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parency will begin to allow market forces to work as individuals begin to apply some downward pressure by asking how much the non-emergency services cost.

As people begin to shop around and make comparisons, and more money comes out of their own pockets, price reductions could begin to occur or at least level off some of the extremes in medical provider charges. We as consumers will begin to encourage true competition among health providers. The consumers (one at a time) will be applying the necessary downward pressure by choosing with their pocketbooks, in conjunction with quality recommendations from their physicians, where to get lower cost tests and procedures done. This only makes sense in a free market economy.

If we don't lower our costs at home, someone else in the world will, where do we go from there? My challenge to you is what will you do about it?

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