**by BOB KINCAID, co-founder of The Head On Radio Network (HORN)**

My Dear Fellow Americans

Sitting here in a hospital room in Summersville, West Virginia waiting to find out if a combination of genetic Calvinism, environmental toxins and my own mistakes have finally caught up with me, I heard playing on my roommate's television an advertisement for some politician whom the announcer told me would "go to Washington and fight against Obamacare." I am furious at a time when I probably shouldn't be, but I may as well make the best of it.

Seldom do I pause to answer in writing the mad, hateful ravings of a right-wing, self-absorbed, Republican candidate for elected office; for if I did, I would never be able to get to the microphone to do it via radio every night. But since the question of healthcare is a matter of importance to Americans of good will across this once-great nation, and since I'm sitting in a hospital bed instead of behind the mic anyway, I feel compelled.

I think I should explain why I am here in Summersville, since so many Republicans, Tea Partiers, Birchers, and Libertarians have wasted so much time, energy, good will and MONEY to keep me from being here.

I am here because it has been made possible for me to be here. Men and women across this country have marched, pled, bled and died for me to be here. Forty thousand uninsured Americans died every year before enactment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Politicians have paid with their careers, thrown out of office by infuriated, unintelligent, frenzied citizens played like a whorehouse piano by the Koch Brothers, Karl Rove, the Republican National Committee and right-wing talk radio goons like the Junkie Rush Limbaugh.

But more basically, I came here because I was enabled to come here by what has been derided, but I now sing hosannas to, as "Obamacare." I am here, because like thousands of other Americans every year, my chest hurts and I hope to not die right yet. I am here because, like MILLIONS of other Americans now, when they NEED medical care, they can GET medical care. I am here in the fond hope of someday seeing my grandchildren reach adulthood. I am here, like loving partners across this country, because I want to grow old with my beloved. I am here because Obamacare makes all that possible.

Yet even as I lay here, wondering at the future, questioning every twinge, waiting in reconnaissance of my own body's missteps, I hear some fool talking in a campaign ad and promising to "Fight Obamacare in Washington."

Brothers and Sisters, I tell you it is not Obamacare she wants to fight, but you. It is me. It is We,

the People. It is your beloved struggling to remain with you yet a little while longer. This is the fight the TeaParty maniacs want to wage. They wage war against the weakest among us in deference to the strongest. They campaign against grannies and aunties, against choir members and convenience store clerks. They campaign against America, itself, and every good impulse that has ever motivated us.

Living as I do in Appalachia, this issue is of tremendous import to me. I live in West Virginia's Third Congressional District. It is the single most physically ill congressional district in the United States. It is also one of the poorest. Every year, we vie with Hal Rogers' district in Kentucky's Mountaintop Removal zone for the sorry title we hold.

We get sick here for a lot of reasons. Poverty. Lack of education. An economy predicated on brutality and hard physical labor. Mountaintop Removal. It's the last one that hits home the hardest. We know that people living in communities near Mountaintop Removal get sick at demonstrably higher rates than people who don't. We know that mothers awaiting the birth of precious children are more likely to give birth to babies with birth defects than mothers who don't live with the daily horrors of Mountaintop Removal.

The brutality of healthcare deprivation and division strikes extra hard in the hollers of Appalachia. People in Kentucky and West Virginia's Mountaintop Removal communities have access to the Medicaid expansion. Our friends and neighbors and kin in Tennesessee and Virginia do not.

I am thus cognizant that we live in a divided nation. We live in a nation where nothing so obvious as skin color or gender may any longer be legally (or credibly) used to create lines of division and inequality. The assault on our vision of a free and equal American future is now drawn along lines economic and geographic, and those lines have proven harder to break than even the color line; for where ham-fisted application of fire hoses and dogs rallied a nation against bloodshed in Birmingham and Selma and national shame at crosses burning beneath the light of the moon, the new political line, augmented by voter suppression and re-districting reduced to farce and resembling nothing so much as an expansion of the same Old South that gave us slavery, lynching and a war founded in treason, has victims who die quietly in ditches, who freeze in cold weather, who suffocate alone in summer heat, who die, in short, for nothing more than want of access to a healthcare system that the right-wing insists upon calling "the best in the world," and to which it struggles mightily to limit access.

This is the reality, you may recall, that Republicans cheered in 2012 when one of their candidates asked "What do you want to do, just let them die?"

I write through this long, nerve-wracking evening because I do have Obamacare here in West Virginia as the result of a humane decision made by a government which has proven as often as not inhumane to its own citizens. I would be a badly self-centered, though, if I did not recognize that this same night in Alabama, a baby will lose its Mama because Alabama refuses to allow the Federal government to provide healthcare to poor Americans inside the boundaries of that state. Little girls who never got to be grannies died in a church in Birmingham fifty years ago. Fifty years later, their brothers and sisters die wanting the coverage that the Affordable

Care Act said was by right to ALL Americans until the Supreme Court implicitly declared that Plessy v. Ferguson doesn't apply to race, but applies in the second decade of the twenty-first century to geography and economy. A poor woman in Alabama with no healthcare is "separate, but equal" to a poor woman in Arizona who has access to the Medicaid Expansion.

The victims of healthcare apartheid will die tonight in Mississippi. They will die tonight in Tennessee. They will die tonight, black and white and every shade in between, in South Carolina, in Louisiana and god they will die and die and die in Texas and Oklahoma.

They will die because the Tea Party and the Republicans and the political monstrosities they enable call those deaths "Freedom."

They will die because OUR work is not yet done; because OUR struggle is not yet complete. They will die until we understand that if one is cursed to die because of the accident of geography of birth in a state that denies healthcare to its working poor, the idea of American citizenship in a state without expanded Medicaid is a hateful fraud, a bitter birthright and a curse upon our future.

We are not "one nation under God," so long as a poor man in Minnesota lives while a poor woman in Idaho must die. We will have no "new birth of freedom" until that freedom includes not having to die of absolutely preventable, treatable disease simply because one struggles for survival in Georgia instead of Kentucky, North Carolina instead of West Virginia.

It is time to get mobile . . . again. It is time to confront those who, by hating and resisting the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion, sign death warrants every day, make widows, widowers and orphans EVERY day. It is time to tell John Roberts that we will not sit still while he enshrines Plessy v. Ferguson for another century, while he sits in cool, academic comfort and signs death warrants for working Americans he would as soon forget exist.

I hope this letter finds you in good health, especially in those neo-Confederate states where your good health is all that stands between you and the dust of the grave. I hope this letter finds you, in those states, seething with the righteous outrage you rightly feel at being so condemned by a cabal of millionaires, zealots and partisan ideologues beholden to billionaires.

I hope this letter finds you, in states where Medicaid has been expanded, in the flush of empowerment to experience the freedom from fear and want that comes with acknowledgment of your basic human right not to die needlessly. I hope this letter finds you willing to stand up and cry out against America's healthcare apartheid, so that in some not-too-distant tomorrow, we may all pledge allegiance to the flag of a nation no longer rendered divisible by the hateful rhetoric of those who seek to keep American citizens from their most essential right to "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Yours for the real freedom that is healthcare access all across the United States,

Bob Kincaid

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