

ATENAS TODAY



*Issue number 56
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ATENAS TODAY is a free English language newsletter for the residents and potential residents of Atenas, Costa Rica. It contains informative articles and creative compositions submitted by our readers, and is distributed via email approximately once a month to over 250 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at fredmac222@yahoo.com.

Compositions from back issues are archived by category on the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce website, www.atenascatuca.com. Click on the English version and then [Atenas Today](#) on the business page.

Updated Directory of English-Speaking People in the Atenas Area

New names and numbers have been added to the directory. With each issue Atenas Today subscribers will receive an updated file containing the names and contact information of people who have chosen to be listed. Simply download the PDF file attached to this Atenas Today email and print it or save it on your computer.

If your name is on the list without contact information, it is because you are a subscriber to the newsletter, but have **not authorized the publication of your email address or other information**. To add or correct data please send an email to fredmac222@yahoo.com.

Atenas Today Interviews Joaquin Vargas
part owner of Vargas and Sons Hardware



Juan and Joaquin Vargas

AT **Vargas and Sons Hardware** is obviously one of the most successful businesses in Atenas. How did it start?

Joaquin: My father started it 51 years ago. He was a coffee farmer in Atenas and opened a store selling fertilizers and pesticides. It grew from there.

AT: Were you and your three brothers always involved in the business.

Joaquin: Absolutely. The four of us worked here from as far back as I can remember. For our family the business was everything.

AT: Have any of you ever lived and worked anywhere else.

Joaquin: Juan and I have always been here. We had to drop out of the university to help. Marvin and Alvero both got engineering degrees and worked other places for a time, but came back.

AT: Is your father still involved?

Joaquin: He retired about ten years ago, but still comes around to check on things. Farming is his real passion, and he spends most of his time raising cows and bulls.

AT: How do the four of you divide up the work?

Joaquin: Juan is the general manager. All the employees work for him. Marvin handles all the administration and accounting. Alvero does the purchasing. My job is major account sales.

AT: Who are some of your major accounts?

Joaquin: We sell hardware and construction materials to hotels and big companies, like Dos Pinos and ICE. I have many customers on the Pacific Coast.

AT: And yet you and all of your brothers are frequently in the store helping people like me find the right light bulb.

Joaquin: The store is the heart of the business.

AT: What are your expansion plans?

Joaquin: Obviously things are slow right now, but we expect Atenas and the mid Pacific Coast to grow dramatically when the new road is completed. We are thinking of opening a store in Rio Grande near the highway, and maybe one in Jaco.

AT: I understand that you are the chairman of a business group in Atenas. How do you and the other business leaders see the future for Atenas?

Joaquin: Atenas has the reputation of being a quiet, residential and farming community. In the past ten years many upper middle class families have build homes here. With the new road people will be able to work in San Jose and live in tranquil Atenas. We want to promote this type of development.

AT: What do you think about all the foreigners moving here?

Joaquin: I think it's great.

AT: What about the effect of the land prices on the native residents?

Joaquin: They realize that development is inevitable. The important thing is to make sure the right kind of people move here.

AT: Let me ask you about yourself. Where and when were you born?

Joaquin: I was born in 1970 in Atenas. Our family farm was in Barrio San Isidro.

AT: Do you have your own family?

Joaquin: I was married at age 23 and have twin boys, both of whom are now going to the university and working part time in the store. Nine years ago I was divorced.

AT: What do you do when not working?

Joaquin: My hobbies are flying and traveling. I have had my pilot's license for 18 years, and go all over Costa

Rica with my friends. One month a year I travel to other countries.

AT: Where have you been?

Joaquin: All over North and South America, and Europe. I like to go alone and meet the people. Driving around the United States is how I learned English.

AT: Where are you going next?

Joaquin: My next big trip will be to China.

AT: What about getting married again?

Joaquin: We have a saying in Costa Rica that we are "waiting for the half orange", which means a bunch of oranges have been cut in half and we are trying to find the pieces that fit together.

AT: Do you ever see yourself leaving Costa Rica?

Joaquin: Never. I love my country.

Su Espacio Dance Classes



Su Espacio is offering a new Latin Dance class for beginners and the more advanced. Come and learn merengue, salsa, cumbia, bachata, swing, and more.

Classes start at 7:00 p.m. on Thursdays for beginners and follow at 8:00 p.m. for the more advanced.

If you wish to only attend one hour, the cost is 1500 colones, or 2000 colones if you would like to stay for both hours (use the second hour to keep practicing or review).

The instructor is Juan Carlos Monge. Having taught at Merecumbe in San Jose, he is really an amazing dancer.

Su Espacio is located across the street in front of the gas station, Coopeatenas. Come join us!

Poems by Martin Lively

Wander Lust

I have a wander lust,
to go,
to someplace far and free.

But even if I do,
I know,
I'll be the same ole me.

-1958

Blossoms on a wet black bough

pink petals passing -
faces on the moving train
commuting in Spring

Our Columnists

Good Enough Mothering



by *Marietta Arce*

Several weeks ago, I was chatting with the mother (Gladys) of one of my son's baseball teammates during a game. We both enjoy baseball and follow the game closely and at one point, her son slid into third base in an amazing play. She turned to me and proudly announced that her laundering duties would be particularly difficult this week: her son's slide resulting in caked-up mud on his uniform, particularly the knee area.

Gladys asked me how I dealt with my own son's dirty uniforms and I sheepishly replied that I haven't done my son's laundry in several years. Her face registered disbelief and I remember feeling just a tiny bit like the 'bad mother' we all read about. I remember trying to explain this reality in my life and discovered that I could not really pinpoint the exact moment when my son decided that he would take care of his own laundry.

Perhaps it was the day when he saw me carefully removing his uniform from the dirty pile and putting it in a bucket for a day or two to loosen the dried dirt. Perhaps it was when he observed me applying elbow grease for a few minutes before tossing it into the washing machine. Perhaps it was on a particularly nasty day when

mountains of laundry surrounded me and he witnessed my sigh of resignation. Perhaps it was when I was walking the cleaning aisle of the supermarket in search of that miracle stain remover!

I remember how liberated my mother felt when we moved to the United States and she was able to have her own housekeeper (washer, dryer, and dishwasher!), freeing her to read her Sunday New York Times while household chores seemed to take care of themselves. I listened (with a mixture of shock and pride) to my mother discuss real estate and politics with the men at parties, while the women were busy comparing cleaning products, recipes and soap operas!

I never quite understood her, and promised myself that I would be a different kind of mother if I ever had children of my own. I am embarrassed to admit that I protested more than once to my mother for all her shortcomings as a parent! She bravely withstood all criticism. My mother proudly stated that her goal in life was not to be a perfect mother but to be a 'good enough mother'. She said that her mission was not to give us the fish for a day but rather to teach us to fish for a lifetime; something she was also trying to accomplish as a social worker with her 'clients'.

My conversation with Gladys brought back all these memories to me and I realize with some chagrin that I have become my mother in many ways. I am providing the environment for my children to develop the skills that I trust will see them through after I am gone. I do not feel compelled to do everything for them, or apologize for feeling that way. I am content to be a 'good enough mother' my way just the way Gladys is her way. I only regret that my mother became

the victim of Alzheimer's before I could tell her so.

Atenas Foundation for Abandoned Animals



by Lori, Sylvia, and Lorna

The Dogs of the Mercado and Atenas Center

Atenas is a very different place for animals than many other villages and or cities in Costa Rica. This is due to the fact that there are many people who work diligently to stop animal suffering and abuse in our town

One of these special people is Isham Collier, who has helped animals for the past 8 years in Costa Rica, and who for the past 2 years has made a giant effort to help the “street dogs” of Atenas.

Isham has taken on the responsibility for the dogs you see at the Mercado and roaming the town center. He, along with the help of others has fixed these animals and feeds them regularly. He keeps track of their whereabouts and worries about them when they go missing.

The life of a “street dog” is not easy, but Isham helps them get by with the cards they have been dealt. We are taking this opportunity to introduce you to these dogs in the hope that you will look at them with kindness and realize you can make a difference in a suffering animal's life, like Isham has done. Most of the expense for feeding and caring for these dogs comes out of his pocket.



Prince Mercado



Bruno Fresy



Annika Cemeterio



Princess Ministerio de Salud



Wolf

There is also a dog in the cemetery area, a big brindle (brown with black stripes) who was abandoned there, full of ticks and fleas. He needs our help; he is very shy and if someone could make friends with him, we could take him to be fixed and vaccinated. If you know this dog, please try to get closer so we can take care of this.

Please contact Lori or Sylvia if you would like to donate specifically for the care of our Mercado dogs or any dog that is on the streets that you can befriend so that we can have them fixed and vaccinated. Together we can improve the life of these dogs and make Atenas even a better place to live. Isham also has a wonderful website if you would like more details about these dogs and how you can help.

Bruno's Story....

This picture may be difficult to look at, but this story can have a very happy ending if you can help this wonderful dog. Please look at this guy, what he has been through, how beautiful he is now, and if you are able to help in any way; please find it in your heart to do so.



Bruno was found in January 2009 near the Central Plaza in Atenas. He was in extremely bad shape as you will see, open flesh instead of fur and he had Ehrlichia.

His treatment has been long and complicated. After 2 months of treatment his fur grew back and he enjoyed his true beauty. The goal was to fix him and find him a forever home. When his food was changed to a normal diet he developed a skin allergy and once again lost his fur.

Because of his weak immune system he was very susceptible to skin disorders including fungus. His diet was then changed to Cordero which is lamb only and now he is doing much better. His fur is growing back but he is not yet back to having his once beautiful clothes!

We have had a couple people interested in adopting him after he recovers but he needs a good home now FOR his recovery. The environment he is currently living in is making him susceptible to infection, although we are grateful he is being taken care of, he needs a loving home now.

Bruno is most likely a German Shepherd – Rottweiler mix, he is 16-17 months old, he is fixed and will need some continuing treatment for his skin condition (at least initially). He is a very friendly boy who deserves a chance for a good life. He has been supported by a kind local Veterinarian and the Foundation since January but he is running out of time.

Please, please help if you can. Donations are always appreciated but he really needs either a foster home so he can fully recover or hopefully a forever home with people who love him. Contact Lori or Sylvia for details or more information.

Lori mysam9494@yahoo.com 2446-0544
Sylvia animalesatenascr@aol.com 8868-1386

Protect your animals from a fatal disease: Ehrlichiosis/ Ehrlichia--- Commonly known as Tick Disease...

What is Ehrlichiosis/ Ehrlichia? The first Ehrlichiosis case was reported in Costa Rica in 1995 and is transmitted by ticks. It is an infectious disease caused by small bacterial organisms. The organisms (Ehrlichia) are capable of infecting humans directly but dogs and cats play a minimal part in the infection of humans

The nose pinchers of ticks produce lesions on the skin, and the saliva will produce toxins as blood is sucked from your pet to the tick. Your pet will become anemic because of red blood cells being destroyed by the bacteria, so it is very important to remove any visible ticks immediately.

This disease starts when an animal is bitten by a tick that is also a carrier of the organism, when the tick's contaminated saliva

gets into contact with the blood stream and infects the animal. After an incubation period of 8 to 20 days, three phases of the disease may manifest: acute, subclinical and chronic. The phases are not necessarily successive and frequently there are variations of the presentation of symptoms depending on the immunity and general health of the animal.

What are the symptoms? In the acute phase the most frequent clinical changes are: fever, anorexia, difficulty breathing, enlargement of the lymph nodes, enlargement of the liver, red blisters on the skin and occasionally nasal bleeding. In any case of decrease in appetite, fatigue, unexplained vomiting, abnormal bleeding, pale gums, uncoordinated movement or difficulty breathing this fatal disease must be suspected.

In the subclinical phase there are no clinical symptoms. In the chronic stage the animal's condition worsens little by little. There's a severe loss of appetite, and the animal looks emaciated and weak. It is also common to see some white spots in the eyes, and sometimes seizures because of the brain damage. At this point the animal's life is under huge risk....

Prevention is the key! At this time there is no vaccine available for this fatal disease. It is difficult to find products that will eliminate the ticks but not cause harm to our pets. Products containing "permethrins" are very effective for tick prevention; this includes Advantix, and some others like Frontline Top Spot and Revolution.

In heavily infested areas, tick collars (Preventic) may be used in conjunction with these treatments. Even if your pet is being treated with these medications it is important to check your pet for visible ticks and remove them immediately. If infected ticks are removed quickly it may be possible to avoid the disease. Also consider using AMITRAZ for controlling the environmental tick popu-

lation. Apply this in spray form several times a week in the places where the animals spend the day, eat, rest or in the cages.

What is the treatment for Ehrlichia? Injectable Imizol and the oral antibiotic Doxycycline should be used for a minimum of 21 days. However, treatment may last 6-8 weeks and may be variable. It is also recommended to administer support treatments such as fluids, blood transfusions, vitamins, iron etc... Associated infections may also require treatment so frequent lab exams may be necessary for your Veterinarian to determine the proper course of treatment. The prognosis if the disease is diagnosed and treated in the acute phase is good, but if the disease is not diagnosed until the chronic phase, the prognosis is guarded to poor.

Contact Lori@ mysam9494@yahoo.com or 2446-0544

Contact Sylvia@ animalesatenascr@aol.com (or 8868-1386 – emails preferred!)

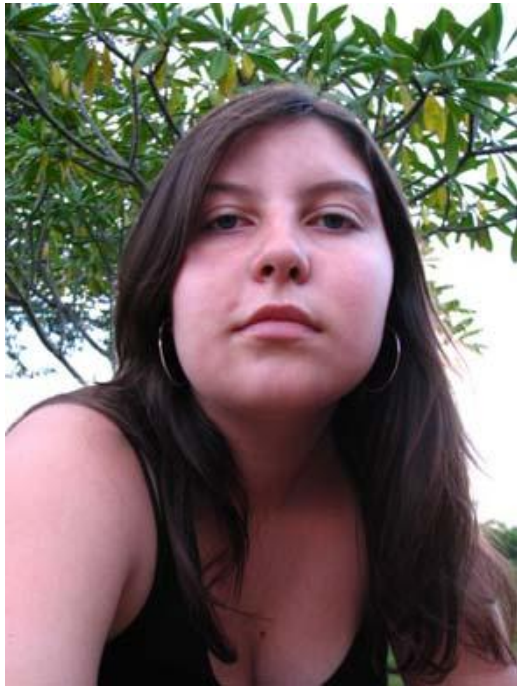
Contact Virginia@ umavik@gmail.com or 2446-5343



Booth at the Friday Market

My Dental Experience

by Dana Schlieman



I had dental surgery earlier this week. I lost my ‘fangs’ about six or seven years ago, and they still haven’t grown in, because I don’t have room in my mouth. Surgery was an interesting experience, and I thought I’d tell you about it.

My mother and I arrived at the doctor’s office half an hour early, as we couldn’t remember if our appointment was at 1:00 or 1:30. The surgeon was already there, also being unsure what time we’d been told. He directed us to the waiting room, and we sat for a couple of minutes.

The doctor is a happy, bouncy guy. I’ll call him Dr. R. Not very tall; shiny, shaved head; reassuringly confident. He came into the waiting room and sat across from me. He promised that it was going to be a very simple procedure, told me not to worry about anything. Though my palms were sweating and I’m pretty sure my heart rate was a little high, I trusted him. I didn’t talk

much, for fear my voice would shake and betray me, but I nodded and smiled a lot.

The doc led me from the waiting room, and I aimed a good-bye wave in my mom’s direction. I followed him to the operating room, was introduced to the assistant, and sat down in the dentist chair. The doctor bustled around the room with quick, all-business movements.

“Now,” he said to me. “I’m going to numb your mouth, so you can’t feel the procedure.” I nodded. “That’s the most important thing to me, that you don’t feel anything,” he continued. I smiled.

“I’ll go very slowly,” he promised. I leaned back and he came towards me with an instrument I tried not to look at. I opened my mouth and waited for the presence of a needle. The pain was very quick, and not too bad. Though he kept his syringe in my mouth, the initial poke was all I felt. Soon I felt nothing in the left side of my mouth.

The doc made sure of this every few minutes. “Still not feeling this, right Dana?” he would say.

Kind of hard to talk here, buddy, I thought.

“Uh-uh,” I managed to grunt.

“That’s good.”

I kept my eyes on the shallow, decorative indents in the white ceiling while the feeling of warm numbness grew in my mouth. Every once in a while I would feel the needle, when he moved to another spot. It was bearable.

After a little bit, Dr. R moved away from my mouth. I could not feel half of my

mouth, which was uncomfortable. “I’m going to give you a chance to rinse before we get started on the other side,” Dr. R said. “It’s the most important thing, that you don’t feel anything,” he repeated.

The assistant handed me a little cup and I rinsed. It was a little difficult, considering the fact that it was kind of hard to tell when the cup was touching my mouth on one side, but I managed to get the blood out of my mouth, and managed with a little more difficulty to ignore that blood. I leaned back in the chair again. The doc talked to me while he refilled the syringe.

“How’s your brother doing?” he asked, smiling brightly. He was familiar with my brother because of his wisdom teeth operation.

“He’s good,” I said, smiling . . . or at least trying to smile. How could I know if it came out right?

“Excellent,” said Dr. R. “Tell him I said hello!”

He advanced with his needle again, and I held my mouth open for him. Another little twinge of the needle, and then the warmth tingled in my mouth again. A few minutes later, some of the Novocain dripped on the back of my tongue. I closed my throat.

“Dana, I dropped some anesthesia on your tongue there,” the doc said. *No kidding.* “It’ll taste a little bitter, but you can wash it out in a second.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Still no pain, right?” he checked. I shook my head a little.

“Perfect, wonderful,” he said. *Boy, this guy likes adjectives,* I mumbled internally.

After a bit, I rinsed, and then he continued to numb. A few more minutes, and there was a loud bang as another doctor (let’s call him Dr. G) entered through . . . Well, I never actually did see where he came through, but anyway, he was suddenly there.

“How we doing?” he asked.

“Man, you scared me!” Dr. R exclaimed. I held my laughter in my throat.

“Hi, honey,” Dr. G, said to me, smiling sympathetically. My whole upper lip and gum were gone for me now, so my smile was even harder to create.

“You can rinse now, Dana,” Dr. R told me. I sat up. “Now, this is the uncomfortable part,” he warned me. “You can’t feel your mouth quite right, so it’s going to be hard to rinse. You might lose some of the water.”

I nodded again, thinking, *Fantastic, I’m gonna drool in front of you.* He was right, that was uncomfortable. I lifted the cup to my mouth, touching it to my lower lip to make sure I’d made it. I managed not to drool in front of the three men, and leaned back again. The doctors talked about the procedure, but the conversation got too technical for me to understand. Whatever. They knew what they were doing.

Dr. R advanced on me again, his assistant coming from the other side, while Dr. G washed up.

“Dana, we’re going to make a little cut now, okay?” Dr. R said to me. “You shouldn’t be able to feel anything, but you have to let me know if you do.”

I nodded. *Yes, you will hear about it if I feel anything, doc, I promise.*

“I’ll talk you through the procedure, let you know what we’re doing, so you’re calm,” Dr. R promised me. I smiled, and nodded.

“Okay,” he said.

He and the assistant both lifted instruments into my mouth, and all I knew then was that it was not exactly a little cut. In fact, he was pretty much diggin’ a grave in there. I didn’t feel it, but I could hear it.

I focused on the ceiling again, and kept my breathing steady. He did talk me through the operation, while the assistant suctioned up the liquid—I refused to think of it as blood—in my mouth

Eventually, it was Dr. G’s turn. I noticed he moved to and from the dental chair a lot, and wondered why he didn’t bring his necessities closer to where we were. But hey, he was the doctor. I know there was wire, a blade, and suction, but of the tools, that was all I was aware of.

I was also aware of the fact that the assistant dropped something in my mouth more than once, but I blocked those thoughts from my mind. It wouldn’t help anyone if I got choke-phobia right now.

The noise was harder to ignore. Apart from the whirring, there was also the wet *ksh-ksh* of my gums under the cutter. Nausea wouldn’t be great either, so I focused on the voices.

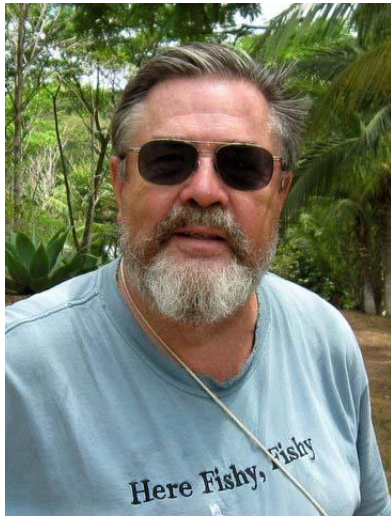
Dr. R kept checking every few minutes. “Still nothing, right?” and “You’re doing excellently, honey, I’m impressed,” were his most common sentences.

Sometimes Dr. R would say stuff to Dr. G like, “I’m not in your way there, am I?” and I would think, *if you are, where are you gonna move to!?* But mostly, they focused on my mouth, and I kept my eyes on the

ceiling. All I know, is it was a good thing I was numb.



New York Mexican Food



by G. Martin Lively

Jalapeno's Central, Comida Tex-Mex, Alajuela Centro

50 mts. Sur del Correo
Prop. Norman Florez
Tel. 2430-4027

In the US we have grown accustomed to a form of "Mexican Food" that is really not true Mexican cuisine but is, like pizza and chop suey, *Gringo, puro gringo*.

Most Mexican restaurants in Northern Virginia are run by people from El Salvador, and most Pizza parlors are run by Greeks! So it is not strange at all to me that a New Yorker with Hispanic ancestry settled in Alajuela and ultimately opened a Mexican restaurant.

I say ultimately because he did not come to open a restaurant, and when he decided to do that he planned a New York Deli with stacked sandwiches and dill pickles. But the more he thought about how well the big corned beef and pastrami might sell, and the more he tried the Costa Rican versions of Mexican food the more he thought about his New York neighborhood Mexican restaurant.

So he learned to cook what comes closest to what he and we from the US like; and I cannot visit Alajuela midday without eating at Norman's Jalapeno's Central Tex-Mex restaurant.

Run through the menu in your mind from your favorite Mexican restaurant back home and it is on the menu. I especially like the Super Burrito, the chicken quesadilla and the fajitas either beef or chicken. All the main items can be ordered a la carte or as a lunch or dinner plate which includes re-fried beans (pinto I think), Spanish rice and a very mild pico de gallo. A very nice hot sauce can be requested and it is that sauce more than anything else which brings the Mexican to this Mexican restaurant. Moderate prices, good refrescos and Chili con carne and hamburgers are also available. Give it a try!

Current Events



by Diane Holman

This past week I listened to President Barack Obama deliver a great speech on health care reform. His words were intelligent, his manner stern.

I was reminded of another orator I had heard in my lifetime: Martin Luther King. In the 60's Martin Luther King was thought, by many people, to be a communist. He was harassed by the FBI and regarded with distrust by many white U.S. citizens.

Martin Luther King devoted his life to the cause of civil rights, advocating for the right of black Americans to be treated equally, in a nation of diversity that had never come to terms with its history of slavery, in a nation that tolerated racism.

Martin Luther King was perceived as a dangerous radical by many, for wanting equal rights for all in the great democracy of the United States. Many whites saw him as a threat to the liberties they assumed belonged only to them by virtue of their skin color.

Most people today, I believe, see Martin Luther King as a great man, as a man devoted to the cause of justice.

I take comfort from this, as I watch the rude and unintelligent response of those on the right wing of politics to the President of the United States as he addresses the cause of health care reform in the United States. Racism plays a part in this response, of course, as the television cameras showed, panning the white, male, Republican contingent sitting with their arms crossed over their bellies, daring a black man to tell them what is good for *their* country. And it is also the case that, as one my friends noted, each of them is protecting their "pile"—their position, *their* health care program, their money.

What have these men had to offer to the United States in the face of the daunting challenges President Barack Obama had to face as he took office after eight years of misguided rule? Nothing. Nothing but venom and opposition to any action taken by President Obama. What have they had to offer to the thousands who lost their jobs in an economy devastated by Republicans? What have they had to offer to the millions of uninsured Americans? Nothing. They are a blot on the moral escutcheon of the United States, and they should be ashamed.

A “Rational” Health Care Debate



by *Fred Macdonald*

Democrat I don’t think the politicians or the press are talking about the fundamental issue in the health care debate.

Republican I agree with you. The fundamental issue is whether we want capitalism or socialism, and we Republicans have pointed that out, but in a muddled way.

Democrat Yes. And we Democrats should admit that the so-called “public option” will eventually result in a single payer system, with the government being the payer. That’s the system we think we should have.

Republican I’m glad you admit that. There is no way the private insurers can compete with the government, when the government does not have to make a profit or pay for marketing their product. Of course, we Republicans don’t want to admit that, because we would be admitting that a government run system would cost less.

Democrat That’s the primary reason all the other industrialized nations are getting better health care for less money. The profits and marketing costs have been removed from their systems.

Republican Maybe. But don’t forget another major cost that we have in the U.S., and that’s our greedy lawyers suing at every opportunity, which forces doctors to order unnecessary procedures just to cover themselves. Our tort laws have to be reformed.

Democrat I agree completely. We democrats have got to stop supporting the trial lawyers. But don’t malign them as being “greedy”; they are just doing what your free market capitalism encourages them to do—make the most money they can within the law.

Republican Okay, so let’s change the law. But let’s get back to the basic issue of whether you want to live under socialism or capitalism.

Democrat All right. We are on the same page about the fundamental issue, but I argue that it is not black or white. We don’t have to have either pure capitalism or pure socialism. Instead we should follow policies that make sense in each situation.

Republican But it’s a slippery slope. Once the government gets control of something they let it keep get-

ting bigger and bigger and more bureaucratic and more costly. Look at social security, Medicare, the post office, Amtrak, farm subsidies, etc, etc

Democrat So you think all those agencies should be in private hands?

Republican We should moving in that direction, letting the free market determine how money is spent. Who needs the post office to be delivering mostly junk to every address in America six days a week?

Democrat Let's get back to health care. It seems to me that this area is a prime example of a case where a completely free market system is the wrong approach. The insurance companies have an inherent conflict of interest. Their goal is to make money, and they make money by signing up healthy people and minimizing payouts for claims. This system will inevitably result in people not getting the health care they need and paying more than they would in a non-profit system.

Republican I don't agree. Your argument would be true if there were only one private insurance company, but there are thousands, all competing with each other. Customers will go to the best managed ones that provide the best care at the best price. If the government is the only insurer, there will be no competition.

Democrat What's so bad about that?

Republican What's bad is that when there is no competition you get mediocrity. All the benefits of the free market will be lost—no choice, no innovation, no incentive for health administrators to work hard and do a good job for their customers. You will not be able to buy health insurance from anyone else. Civil service clerks will have unlimited power over people's health choices. You will have all the problems of a socialistic/communistic system.

Democrat Not true. The doctors and other health providers won't work for the government. The government is providing only insurance. And you will still be able to buy supplemental insurance to cover things the government insurance doesn't, just like you do now with Medicare.

Republican But once the government takes away the mass market for health insurance, those supplemental plans will be very expensive, if they exist at all.

Democrat So you think it's worth letting the insurance companies make a profit off the backs of sick people in order to keep the choices and supposed efficiencies of a free market system?

Republican Absolutely. Efficiencies and freedoms and opportunities. That's what makes America different from Europe, and why ambitious people want to come here.

Democrat Aren't there enough free market opportunities for people to make money without including health care in the mix?

Republican Health care is something like 15% of our economy and growing. You turn that over to the government and you are socializing a major sector.

Democrat But there is still plenty of opportunity. I don't accept that socializing the health care system will fundamentally change the nature of American capitalism. What it will do is reduce the costs by eliminating the marketing expenses and the profits, just as it has done with Medicare.

Republican It's creeping socialism!

Democrat Not every American wants to be a pure capitalist. Some of us just want to live our lives with some security in terms of health costs. What about the people the insurance companies don't want as customers, those who have expensive illnesses or who can't afford to pay the premiums? Isn't it true that insurance company shareholders don't want those customers?

Republican Yes, that's why I support reforming the system. Just as banks have to abide by certain rules, so should health insurance companies. If you want to sell health insurance you should not be able to deny people for pre-existing conditions or to set limits on payments. Our insurance companies could live with this requirement because it would be the same for all of them, and would not change the competitive situation.

Democrat Won't this force them to charge higher premiums?

Republican Maybe. But these higher costs could be offset by requiring everyone to buy health insurance, just like we do for car insurance. In order for health insurance to work, the young healthy people have to be part of the pool. No more self insuring and relying on the emergency room.

Democrat You want everyone to buy insurance, which will give the insurance companies more customers, but what if lower paid people cannot afford to pay the prices the insurance companies ask?

Republican I don't buy the assumption that universal health care is a human right. We all have to take care of ourselves. The government already provides health care to the indigent under the Medicaid program. That keeps people from dying on the streets, and that's all we should do. If you don't qualify for Medicaid you should be required to buy private insurance.

Democrat What about the "working poor"? Their insurance premiums would consume a major chunk of their income.

Republican I would not be opposed to tax credits for low income workers to help them buy insurance.

Democrat How can you force people to buy insurance?

Republican First of all, I would require all employers to offer minimum health insurance and deduct the

premiums from worker's pay checks, just like they do now for Social Security. If you are self employed and don't qualify for Medicaid and don't buy your own policy, you would be fined an equivalent amount.

Democrat And if you didn't pay the fine?

Republican You would be treated like a person who doesn't pay their taxes. Your bank account and assets could be seized.

Democrat So you would keep the present system of employers competing with each other for workers by paying all or part of an employee's health insurance. How does that affect our competitiveness in the global economy where the governments in other industrialized countries provide health insurance, and the businesses do not have these costs?

Republican The people and businesses in those countries pay for it in taxes, so as a society they are not in a competitive advantage. If anything our businesses can be more competitive, because they have a choice about the benefits they offer their workers.

Democrat It seems to me your attitude comes down to believing that as a society we should have no mandated obligation to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

Republican That's basically correct. I believe in charity, but it should be a choice. My quality of life and that of my family comes first. Socialism inevitability results in

the lazy and irresponsible playing the system at the expense of the rest of us. Programs like tax supported universal health care will mean that those of us who have good care now will get less. That has to happen if the total amount paid in the form of taxes and premiums remains the same and the number of beneficiaries goes up.

Democrat So why not increase the total amount paid so everyone can be covered, and the well off can buy the level of coverage they want? Besides, the cost savings from a single payer system would probably result in the total amount going down, not up.

Republican That's wishful thinking. As more treatment options become available more and more money is going to be spent on health care. The system should not be weighted in favor of those who have not succeeded financially.

Democrat But we are not all blessed with good health. Your medical bills can break you through no fault of your own. Shouldn't health care be an exception to your "go it alone" philosophy, much the same way national defense is?

Republican Medical bills cannot break you if you are prudent and buy insurance, and if the insurance companies are required to sell it to you regardless of your condition.

Democrat We seem to be an impasse. I am happier doing with less myself in order for weaker and less fortunate people to have adequate health care.

Republican That's not a fair way to put it.
It's a matter of degree. But you
are right that we will never

agree completely on this issue.
That's why we are in different
political parties.

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