FIXING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM:

Let's start with what's essential.

The health care system in Oregon faces severe challenges. Today's issues may be the most difficult ever. In the months ahead, we'll use this space to present our views on health care reform – and we hope you'll share your views with us. There are plenty of details to debate, but let's start with three essentials.

First, a solution that improves public health must include universal coverage. This will require bold action – not incremental change around the edges – by policymakers, hospitals, doctors, insurers, employers and employees. We all share the responsibility for making sure everyone has fair access to affordable health care, where costs are better controlled and outcomes are improved.

Second, we face a significant health care labor shortage. The kind of changes we make in our health system will define the workforce we will need to educate in order for reform to succeed. Proposals must consider the costs associated with educating doctors and health providers.

Third, medical research is the source of new treatments, procedures and cures. The changes we make need to encourage innovation, effective practices and discovery to support the future health of all Oregonians.

It's already clear that fixing Oregon's health care system will not be easy. But Oregonians are known for working together to solve tough issues. If we take that approach and stay focused on essentials, solutions are within reach.

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Joe Robertson

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First in a series.
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