

SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February 2, 2016

ATTACHMENT 1

Hearing Address

Good Afternoon Chairman and committee members, I am Chelle Gluch and I live in the gap. I am here to share my story because, unfortunately, it is not a singular story.

78,000 Idahoans live in the gap; it's a scary place. There is no dignity here. We scrape by as best we can, always looking for a way out, a way to escape.

Living in the gap has dire consequences. We live in terror of illness and injury—one emergency can devastate us. We are often forced to choose between seeing a doctor, keeping the lights and heat on, or filling our gas tank. We simply cannot afford medical care.

From the beginning, my family felt squeezed. My husband is chronically ill—he struggles with stomach pains so severe that he often cannot stand and vomits for hours, sometimes for days. Dealing with this has been like trying to escape quicksand. My husband wants to work, and so when the pain got severe, he sought medical care. But with only my income, bills mounted quickly. Soon, we owed thousands of dollars.

So we cobbled together a method to receive care. We utilize cheap care we can find it, but mostly we ignore it until the pain is too much and we end up in the ER. Whenever possible we found a doctor who would work with him. We were reaching for hope to pull us out of the muck.

It's been ten years. We owe 60,000 dollars in medical debt. But without answers my husband can't work. We are stuck tight in this terrible cycle.

I can't breathe, I am squeezed so tight. Despite the fact that I've returned to college to find a better career with health benefits, I'm afraid we will never escape the pit; there are so many bills. I can't breathe.

My story is not unique. Most of my friends fall into the gap—waitresses, care providers, construction workers, adjunct faculty, store clerks-- the people who keep Idaho running. But we live in the gap and are denied the most basic medical care.

And that is why I am so excited about the Healthy Idaho Plan. It requires that participants take responsibility for our own health while helping us out of the quicksand. With the Healthy Idaho Plan, the working poor will have some control over our own health and futures. While I thank Governor Otter for his efforts, the PCAP leaves the working poor teetering on the brink of financial ruin by excluding emergency care.

I ask you today to please adopt the Healthy Idaho Plan so that the working poor can have some dignity and control over their own health and financial futures. We do not want to be the burdens that society perceives us to be. Give us a chance to show you what we can do with this opportunity.