

The Dallas Morning News

January 22, 2008

Pilot thinks no one in U.S. should suffer

By Jason Roberson

Twice a week, former soldier Kevin Cornwell takes a \$300 shot for the arthritis in his ankles.

Luckily, the 53-year-old American Airlines pilot has a company-sponsored insurance plan that provides him a three-month supply for just \$150.

Like Mr. Cornwell, 75 percent of Texans already have company-sponsored health insurance or some government-backed plan like Medicare or Medicaid. Come Election Day, it will be that majority who decides how best to cover the uninsured.

Even though Mr. Cornwell will not directly benefit from insurance coverage for everyone - and could eventually see his own insurance or tax costs rise because of it - he wants something done.

"If it weren't for the insurance, I just simply could not afford

it," he said of his arthritis medication. "It's just not right that people should suffer when medicine is available.

"I don't know if universal health care or some type of tax deduction is the answer, but in my opinion nobody in the United States should be without some kind of health care," he said.

Though Mr. Cornwell said pilots tend to vote conservative, he's leaning toward a Democrat this year.

Devon Herrick, a health economist with the National Center for Public Policy Analysis, a Dallas-based conservative think tank, said Democrats' plans for universal health coverage might not immediately affect the average person getting insurance through an employer. "But in the long run you'd see insurance costs go up.

"Look at the states that have done this, like Massachusetts,"

he said, referring to the rise in insurance costs there since the state enacted universal coverage when Mitt Romney was governor. He's now a Republican presidential candidate.

Mr. Herrick, like a lot of other Republicans, thinks the solution to the nation's health woes is in making patients pay more of their own health costs. Then, the thinking goes, they'll be more likely to rein in spending and drive down overall costs.

Meanwhile, Mr. Cornwell argues that health care is already beyond the means of many Americans.

The Democrats and the conservatives do share some common ground, Mr. Herrick said. "We all tend to agree that things are really screwed up. We need reform."