



## Podcast Transcript

# On The Front Lines of Washington's Single-Payer Fight

*Featuring Georgia Davenport  
Founder & Operations Director, Whole Washington*

*Dispatcher: 911, what's your emergency?*

*Caller: America's healthcare system is broken and people are dying! (ambulance siren)*

(00:07):

Welcome to **Code WACK!**, where we shine a light on our callous healthcare system, how it hurts us and what we can do about it. I'm your host, **Brenda Gazzar**. This time on **Code WACK!** Who's the founder of the grassroots coalition, **Whole Washington**, and what led her to champion healthcare reform in the Evergreen State? What's been done so far to advance health care for all and what's next for the single-payer movement there? We recently spoke to Whole Washington founder and former campaign director, **Georgia Davenport**, who has helped lead the all-volunteer initiative effort for universal health care in the state. She also ran for Washington state House of Representatives in 2020.

(5-second stinger)

## **Welcome to Code WACK! Georgia!**

**Davenport:** Thank you so much for this opportunity to talk to you today.

[\(00:56\)](#):

**Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself. I understand you once worked as a horse wrangler.**

[\(01:00\)](#):

**Davenport:** Oh yeah, you've gone way back. Yeah, actually I went to a Girl Scout camp in Angel Fire in New Mexico for most of my youth and then eventually got a job as a riding instructor and a wrangler there. So yeah, that was a wonderful time in my life. Very, very young. That was about 25 years ago now.

[\(01:22\)](#):

**Q: Wow. And where do you live now and what do you do?**

[\(01:25\)](#):

**Davenport:** I live north of Spokane in a little tiny town called Nine Mile Falls. I'm the operations director for Whole Washington and I am a web designer and a mom.

[\(01:35\)](#):

**Q: Wonderful. And are you also the founder of Whole Washington?**

[\(01:38\)](#):

**Davenport:** Yes. So in 2017, I founded Whole Washington after I was a staffer for Initiative 735, which was the initiative to overturn Citizens United. That passed by 64% in 2016 and we kind of looked at what we wanted to do next. I love the initiative process. It's direct democracy. We can circumvent elected officials who are refusing to take action on really, really important issues like health care. So we discussed what we wanted to do next and health care was the number one priority in our minds. So we brainstormed some different names and came up with Whole Washington and in 2017, I filed the paperwork and we became a 501C4.

[\(02:21\)](#):

**Q: Wow. So how did you personally become interested in this issue of healthcare reform?**

[\(02:26\)](#):

**Davenport:** Well, like most people in the United States, I have experienced not having health insurance when I was much younger. My husband and I, before we were married, we got pregnant and I didn't have health insurance. Fortunately there was a program at the time that I

could be a part of and that would cover the baby while in utero and then after the baby was born, it would cover the baby. Not me though, just the baby, which was really important to me because I wanted to make sure that the baby was healthy. I never thought of like the consequences of that kind of coverage until about three months into the pregnancy, I started experiencing severe cramps and bleeding. I went to the doctor and they informed me I was having a miscarriage, which I kind of thought was what was happening, and they also informed me at that time because my coverage only was valid while there was a viable life form with a heartbeat, that if I wanted to get a D&C, which is what it's called to help the miscarriage along, that it would cost me \$3,000.

[\(03:36\)](#):

And so I didn't have that kind of money. I went home and had the miscarriage and then a few months later I got a call from a collection agency saying that the appointment with the doctor where they told me that I was having a miscarriage, I owed money for because the baby didn't have a heartbeat. So that was my first, like, real traumatic experience with our healthcare system. And one of the main reasons why I felt really drawn to universal health care and Medicare for All is because I don't want anybody else to experience anything like that. It was horrible.

[\(04:15\)](#):

**Q: *I'm so sorry you went through that. It sounds horrible.***

[\(04:17\)](#):

**Davenport:** It was awful. And you know, one of the things that I remember so clearly is the collection agent. It was like a guy who called me. He was almost in tears with me. I can't even imagine having to make those kinds of phone calls to people telling them that they owed money because, you know, of circumstances like that.

[\(04:37\)](#):

**Q: *Wow, and how long ago was this?***

[\(04:40\)](#):

**Davenport:** I was 26. So I'm 42 now. So a while ago and now I have a 10-year-old daughter and I have good insurance now, but still, you know, I don't want anybody to experience anything like that.

[\(04:52\)](#):

**Q: *Thank you so much for sharing that story with us, Georgia.***

[\(04:55\)](#):

**Davenport:** No problem. It's difficult to tell. I I've gotten to the point where I don't completely break down in tears, but yeah, I just, I feel like telling stories like that are really important and I know they're very personal and so it's difficult for people to tell, but I think that we do need to share how broken our system is, even if it is a really personal story like that.

[\(05:16\)](#):

**Q: Right. Right. Thank you. So you live in Washington state, which is listed by U.S. News and World Report as the best state in the country for the past few years and 8th when it comes to health care, which is not bad. Washington was among the first states to implement or pass a public option. Tell us about that and how it's working so far.**

[\(05:35\)](#):

**Davenport:** That's really a misnomer, unfortunately. Jay Enslee, who is our governor, ran for president and one of the things he ran on was, of course, being strong on environmental issues, but then secondarily, he wanted to show that he's really progressive when it comes to health care. So they came up with this so-called public option. Well, a public option by definition is supposed to be not-for-profit - a state-run health insurance option that anybody can opt into that competes with private insurance. Well, this is actually the HCA – that's the Health Care Authority in Washington state – using our tax dollars, funneling them to for-profit insurance companies. And only a few per percentage of the population in Washington state can even apply for the public option. I don't know the exact numbers, but it was a very minuscule amount of people who even opted in. And the only people who can opt in are people who currently get their health insurance through the exchange. So really it wasn't a public option. I wrote a few articles about it. if anybody who's watching wants to read more on my Medium account and it really goes into detail about who qualifies, what that bill actually did.

[\(06:48\)](#):

**Q: And Washington has also tried to control costs, I believe, by capping provider reimbursements. Is that right?**

[\(06:54\)](#):

**Davenport:** I'm not sure about that. I would have to look it up. I haven't heard about that one, but that would make sense. There's a lot of places like rural areas where I live, where we don't have very many insurance options. In fact, there were two counties for a while that were at risk of losing any private insurance coverage altogether, just because insurers know that in rural areas, it costs more to cover residents so most providers in this area rely on Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements and so a lot of providers are actually shutting their doors and people like myself and my neighbors have to rely on what's called life flight. If there's any sort of emergency, there's no emergency room anywhere close by. So you've got this helicopter that comes and picks you up and then later on you get like a \$70,000 bill for the helicopter service.

[\(07:45\)](#):

So I know that a lot of the times we live in like this echo chamber on the left and progressive circles thinking that like universal health care is like a leftist issue. Well in rural areas we're suffering the worst under the system because there are no providers nearby. And like I said, if you get hurt, you know, fall off a roof, fixing your roof and you break a leg and you know, you need to get life flighted to the nearest hospital, you could look, be looking at it, just, just for that transportation, tens of thousands of dollars.

[\(08:18\)](#):

**Q: Wow. That's insane. Um, so it sounds like the so-called public option and any attempts to try to control capping provider reimbursements, sound like these achievements would not be enough, is that right?**

[\(08:32\)](#):

**Davenport:** No, definitely not. Like I said, very, very few Washingtonians, even qualified for the public option and even less than the percentage of people who qualified to opt in you decided to utilize it because like I said, 10% of somebody's income is not affordable. Especially if you're living paycheck to paycheck and spending like \$2,500 on a house to rent in Seattle, Washington. It's a very expensive place to live, not very many people are able to even utilize that public option.

[\(09:04\)](#):

**Q: Georgia, tell us a little bit more about the Whole Washington coalition and why you founded it?**

[\(09:09\)](#):

**Davenport:** Yeah. So in 2017 I founded it so that we could run a ballot initiative to get universal health care on the ballot. And in 2018, after we had formed a coalition to write a very strong piece of legislation that we ... it's not just like we are telling our legislators, this is what we want. It's actually a fully written out healthcare bill that would create a nonprofit universal healthcare system that covers dental vision, mental health, zero copays, zero deductibles. We really modeled it off after the Medicare for All bill. In 2018, we ran an initiative at 100% volunteer effort. I was the campaign director and we got 105,000 signatures, which is not bad for a grassroots effort for our first go round. The initiative that I worked on before Initiative 735, we actually had to go twice as well.

[\(10:07\)](#):

The first time we didn't collect enough signatures. We regrouped, collected enough signatures and then passed it. So that was what we were gearing up to do in 2020, but then COVID hit and it's really been like completely unpredictable to run a campaign in the current environment. So we did try again this last year, 2021, but because the Delta variant was overrunning our

hospitals, there weren't big events. It wasn't really safe to run an initiative because unfortunately with Washington state law, you need wet signatures. That's what they call them. In other words, ink to paper, you can't do it online.

So we felt like it wasn't safe to continue collecting signatures in person. So we suspended our campaign and we're gearing up to hopefully run an initiative in 2022. We've got a new campaign director, **Andre Stackhouse** who has an amazing vision for how we're going to get this done. We've onboarded 50, more than 50 now, signature captains across the state, including myself, who are committing to collect a certain amount of signatures per week so that we can get on the ballot. I'm really excited about the new vision with the campaign director and how organized we are going forward into this next year.

[\(11:27\)](#):

**Q: Wow. Wonderful. Best of luck with that.**

[\(11:30\)](#):

**Davenport:** *Thank you.*

[\(11:31\)](#):

***Join Georgia and me next week for more on the Washington state single-payer campaign.***

***Thank you, Georgia Davenport.***

***Do you have a personal story you'd like to share about our 'wack' healthcare system? Contact us through our website at [heal-ca.org](http://heal-ca.org).***

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