

‘Bottom-line vampires?’

How insurance companies are sucking U.S. businesses dry



IN THIS EPISODE

Why is providing employee health insurance a growing burden on American businesses? How are some large employers managing to cut out the health insurance middleman? **Why didn't the Affordable Care Act solve all these problems?**

Join host **Brenda Gazzar** and guest **Wendell Potter**, co-founder of [Business Leaders for Healthcare Transformation](#), for these answers and more! Potter, former VP of corporate communications at Cigna and insurance industry whistleblower, is a New York Times bestselling author. ***Tune in to this second of two podcasts on the ultimate price American businesses pay for their employees' health care.***

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

Health insurance is very complicated and increasingly expensive. How are business owners able to sort it out to find the best deal?

“...our system has become so complex, so hard to understand that employers...have to hire brokers or consultants to help them try to figure out the most affordable way to provide coverage to their workers. What they don't often realize is in many cases, those brokers work for insurance companies and are getting paid a commission for every sale they make. So it's...really quite a scam. Most employers are completely unaware of this. They're unaware of all the hidden fees that they're being charged...” – **Wendell Potter**

Health insurers keep increasing premiums, year after year. How can employers keep up with these costs and still be competitive?

“They are sucking money out of our employers that otherwise could go into improving the business or paying their workers more, but more and more every year has to go into insurance companies to cover the premiums that they demand, to the point that more and more employers are throwing in the towel.

Only 31% of employers with 50 or fewer workers offer coverage now and fewer than half of employers overall are offering coverage now. The big ones stay in the game, but even as I said earlier, *even they* are finding it increasingly difficult to see how they can continue doing this forever. They can't (do it) forever and stay in business. It's just not a possibility.” – **Wendell Potter**

How would having Medicare for All affect business?

“...if American businesses didn't have to spend as much money as they are having to spend on health care, they could give us raises. They could expand their operations. They could invest in new technologies. There are a lot of ways that money could be better spent to improve the bottom line of those companies to pay workers better, to give them other, you know, better benefits... -- **Wendell Potter**

Helpful Links

[Center for Health & Democracy](#)

[Americans \(with insurance\) can't afford their medical care. They're turning to GoFundMe.](#)

Wendell Potter NOW

[Health Insurance Coverage Eight Years After the ACA: Fewer Uninsured Americans and Shorter Coverage Gaps, But More Underinsured](#)

Commonwealth Fund

[Insurers Hand Out Cash and Gifts To Sway Brokers Who Sell Employer Health Plans](#)

NPR Health News

[U.S. businesses are trying to control employee health care costs](#)

NPR (WFAE 90.7, Charlotte)

[Cost of premiums, deductibles are an increasing burden on working Americans](#)

Benefits Pro

Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#).

Wendell Potter Biography

Wendell has more than four decades of experience as a communications professional, going back to his teenage years in Tennessee, where he served as a high school correspondent to his hometown paper, The Kingsport Times-News. His journalism career would later take him to Memphis, Nashville, and finally Washington, D.C., where he covered Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court for Scripps-Howard Newspapers.

Although best known for his career in corporate public relations, Wendell has also served as press secretary to a Tennessee gubernatorial candidate, head of advertising and PR for a large integrated health care system in East Tennessee, a partner in an Atlanta public relations firm, and a state and federal lobbyist.

His first corporate job was at Humana Inc., where he headed the company's communications department in Louisville, Kentucky. From there he was recruited to Cigna Corporation, where he served in a variety of positions over nearly 15 years in the company's Bloomfield, Connecticut, and Philadelphia offices. His responsibilities included leading the company's corporate communications team and serving as chief corporate spokesperson. He also represented Cigna on several industry committees and task forces, including the strategic communications committee at the industry's largest PR and lobbying group, America's Health Insurance Plans.

After seeing firsthand how strategic PR and lobbying is used unfairly to tilt the scales toward corporate interests against the people's interests, Wendell left his corporate career to advocate for meaningful health care reform. He made headlines in 2009 when he disclosed in Congressional testimony how insurance companies, as part of their efforts to boost profits, have contributed to spiraling healthcare costs and the growing number of Americans without health insurance. He also revealed how insurance companies use their customers' premiums to wage multi-million dollar PR and lobbying campaigns to influence public opinion and public policy. Since then, he has spoken at more than 200 public forums and authored the award-winning book, [*Deadly Spin, An Insurance Company Insider Speaks Out on How Corporate PR Is Killing Health Care and Deceiving Americans*](#). His latest offering is an eBook entitled, [*Obamacare: What's in for Me? What Everyone Needs to Know about the Affordable Care Act*](#).

Previously, Wendell was a columnist for The Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that produces original investigative journalism. His articles and commentaries have appeared in many publications including The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Tampa Bay Times, The Guardian, Newsweek, The

Nation, Huffington Post, CNN.com, NBC.com, Democracy Journal, and healthinsurance.org. Wendell has been the subject of numerous articles in the U.S. and foreign media, including The New York Times and The Washington Post, and has appeared frequently as a guest on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX News Channel, MSNBC, PBS, and NPR.

In 2017, Wendell launched Tarbell.org, a non-partisan news publication with the mission is to provide objective, investigative reporting on hard hitting topics affecting Americans.

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[Join Health Care for All California](#) *to keep up with local actions to support California single-payer health care.*

[Join Physicians for a National Health Program](#) (PNHP) *to support a national campaign to improve and expand Medicare to all residents of the U.S.*