

## **We All Need to Work Together To Take Care of All Americans**

By Bette Holland

The week before Christmas our state senator, Chip Pearson, wrote an article entitled, “A Christmas reminder to protect our Christian government”. It was very interesting but had several misleading statements and statements that could and should be questioned.

First, the idea of putting “God back into Government” and that our government is a “Christian government” is directly opposed to what the first amendment of our Constitution says—separation of church and state. “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” This means that government cannot establish, support, or otherwise involve itself in any religion. We do not live in a country which is run on religious principles, such as Iran which is run by the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah [Ruhollah Khomeini](#). Iran’s President answers to their supreme Islamic leader. That is a theocracy. Our government is secular. The founders of our country purposely wanted religion to be separate from our government. And yes, although America is predominately Christian, many people of other religions or non-religions are represented throughout our country in our government and in our personal lives. And so, although the several quotes he made by some of our early leaders indicate that they were Christian, that does not mean that our government is Christian. There were also non-Christian leaders among our founding fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson. The intent of our Founding Fathers was not to make this a government run by religious leaders, but by leaders of all faiths and beliefs or non-belief.

He then goes on to quote several verses from the bible including Luke 11:9. Passages from the bible can be interpreted in different ways. But the intimation Mr. Pearson makes is that somehow the millions of poor people who rely on Medicaid, Food Stamps, Unemployment compensation, or low-cost housing should somehow be totally taking care of themselves because as he says, “Government has become a false idol” and has become corrupt. He says government is “providing for every want and whim” of the poor. Is it a “want or whim” to need a decent place to live, clothing, and food for your table? These are the basic needs of life, not whims. There are many passages in the bible that ask Christians to care for the poor, including **Luke 3:11**. “Let the man with two tunics share with him who has none, and let him who has food do likewise”. I take that to mean that we should help the poor by whatever means is best.

What Mr. Pearson says is that our churches and communities should be taking care of the poor, not our government. However, seventeen percent of our population lives at or below the poverty level. That is around 50 million people. As hard as our churches and community organizations work, they could never provide the medical care, housing, and food that are provided through our government. First, they would have to raise billions of dollars which would be very difficult to do, and second, they would not have the means of reaching all the people in need. Although we would prefer that all our citizens have decent paying jobs making enough money so they could raise their families, the reality is that there are many working poor. These people have two or three part time jobs with no medical coverage and such low pay that no matter how hard they work, they are still poor! They need a place they can go to for help.

The third item I take issue with is Mr. Pearson's statement that the government is trying to take over health care. Throughout the health care debate conservatives have used misleading statements and scare tactics to turn people against health care reform. That is also wrong. Since Mr. Pearson likes to quote from the bible, he might want read James 3:14 which says, "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth." In reality the legislation passed by the senate and the house is an attempt to bring individual health care costs under control so that the millions of people who can't afford health insurance and therefore health care, will be able to.

Our churches and community organizations are a vital part of the fabric of America. Their hard work to help those in need is commendable and greatly appreciated. But it would be impossible for these churches and community organizations to care for all of the 50 million people who live in poverty. It would be a great burden for them to raise the billions of dollar necessary for this and the developing the network of information they would need to reach all those people would be cost prohibitive. Our government is the best vehicle for reaching all of these people and not just the few that can be reached locally. And while it would be preferable that we have no poor in this country, the reality is that we do and it is the moral obligation of those who are able to help to provide for those in need.