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## OTIS

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So, we support the development of clear guidelines on how conversion would occur if it became necessary for us to take that step for our customers. Four guiding principles should govern a conversion.

First, the people of North Carolina should share in the benefits of a conversion. If Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina ever converts, we support the creation of one or more foundations, funded by stock at the time of conversion, for the charitable purpose of serving the health needs of North Carolinians.

We recommend an approach simi-

lar to that used in California. There, two foundations were created to receive the value of the company in stock when a Blue plan converted. Those foundations today oversee grants to benefit the health needs of the people of that state.

Second, any legislation governing conversion must protect the assets of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina to pay our customers' medical claims and keep the company financially strong. By protecting the company assets, we guard our customers' access to quality, affordable medical care.

Third, any legislation must ensure that no one associated with the company profits from the process of conversion.

Fourth, any legislation must ensure that Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina maintains the business flexibility it needs to meet our customers' needs and remain competitive in the health care market.

We believe these four principles lay the foundation for legislation that will best serve the people of North Carolina and our policyholders. They clearly establish the framework that would govern a conversion.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina has had the legal right to convert under state law since 1953. But we've never seen the need to exercise that right. However, a few Blue plans in other states have converted in recent years. We believe that fact, cou-

pled with the fact that there are no clear cut guidelines on the conversion issue, is what prompted this issue to be raised in North Carolina.

We have studied the complex conversion issues carefully. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina has made a comprehensive study on this issue. We held no preconceived notions of what rules should govern a conversion other than the fact that any guidelines must be fair to the people of North Carolina and protect our customers and the long-term health of the company.

A strong Blue Cross is in everyone's best interest. More than 1.6 million North Carolinians depend on Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina for their health insurance.

We provide competitive pay and top benefits to more than 2,600 employees. On average, we pay nearly \$14 million in federal, state and local taxes each year.

While we have no plans to convert our company, changes in how people receive health care may mean we need to do so in the future. So, we will work with the General Assembly on incorporating these four principles in guidelines developed for converting.

At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, we put the people we serve first. For 65 years, we've provided North Carolinians in all 100 counties with access to quality, affordable health care coverage. We want to be here for at least another 65 years serving the people of this state.

## EAKES

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years to raise capital for the foundation's endowment fund. The foundation's board of directors must be free to sell this stock as it deems appropriate to maximize its value. This

decision must be made independent of the business interests of the for-profit Blue Cross.

If legislation specifies the purpose of the new foundation, this mission should be broad enough to last a century or more: "to make grants that promote the health of the people of North Carolina." Given the rapid evo-

lution of health care which is occurring today, who can predict now exactly what role the foundation should play in 20 years? In this and other instances, the specific language of the legislation recommended by the Legislative Study Commission will be crucial.

How the conversion foundation is

established legislatively will have a tremendous impact on the ultimate size, capability, and independence of the foundation. I believe this foundation will eventually make \$50 million or more in health-related grants each year, which is a remarkable legacy for future generations of North Carolinians.

This possibility demands that all of us support and participate in the continuing work of the legislative study commission — now more than ever.

## CHANGE

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by all Americans, Bradley said. And while people are working harder, they're earning less.

What's more, our civic fabric is being ripped apart. Politics is driven by "too much money." The media do not "create a context for us to think about the future." People in public life often "fail to lead from their core convictions." And Americans increasingly are reluctant to participate in the political process.

"We're better than this," Bradley said. "We think about politics in too narrow a context."

The context in which we must work to make a difference, he said, is the intersection of business, government and "civil society" — that space in which we raise kids, worship and interact with neighbors and com-

munity organizations.

To claim the future we want, he said, Americans also must reach across the racial divide, and learn to talk to one another about race and our "common future."

With the Soviet threat gone, America must be a world leader by setting an example as a "pluralistic democracy with a growing economy that takes everybody to higher ground."

The solution, he said, lies with individual and collective acts of conscience and compassion: "Millions of Americans are yearning for something that's deeper than the material in our lives."

America indeed finds itself at a crossroads.

We can preach to the choir about the value of voluntarism and doing good while pushing government to unburden itself of the task of ensuring the well-being of Americans living

on the margin. Or we can work to build strategic alliances wherever possible that will shoulder the tough jobs in our communities.

Elizabeth Dole and Bill Bradley both urge each of us to make a difference.

But where Dole peddles statistics and rhetoric to make her case, Bill Bradley delivers a thoughtful, provocative and down-to-earth message that cuts to the core of the problems that bedevil our communities.

As he was leaving the North Carolina summit, I asked Bradley what single piece of advice he would give Americans wanting to create the kind of civil society he envisions.

After pausing for a moment, he replied: "Make a commitment personally to do something for a neighbor."

On such principles are communities built.

Todd Cohen

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