

My name is Don. I am a 50-year-old survivor of a logging accident. Almost two years ago, a straight-line wind came up on our family farm while I was cutting down a 1,600 pound tree. That tree fell on me. As impressive as the fact that I didn't die that day is the fact that I have returned to my family, my job and my community and am living a life of meaning and purpose. I am here with you today to tell you that my medical miracle would not have happened without our area's outstanding health care system and places like Bethesda Hospital.

After I was transported by ambulances and helicopter, then taken to--and treated at--a Level One trauma hospital, I was referred to Bethesda Hospital by my trauma surgeons. With seventeen bones that were broken in about sixty places, a collapsed lung, a bruised heart and a stretched aorta, I was in a non-weight bearing condition, in respiratory failure, with a tube in my larynx to help me breathe, coming out of a coma, with many surgical steel plates, pins, and screws holding me together.

My first awareness upon reawakening after the accident was of nine different tubes servicing my body. As you can see, the tubes are all gone. I ended up staying six weeks at Bethesda Hospital working with doctors, nurses, and therapists one-on-one, hour by hour, day by day to regain my strength and to learn how to breathe on my own, talk, clean myself, feed myself, use a wheelchair, and eventually walk again. That sort of care is not available in our community hospitals or in a nursing home. In a community hospital, you might stay four or five days. At Bethesda Hospital, the average length of stay is 25-30 days and many patients, like me, come from community hospital intensive care units. Bethesda is one of only two long-term acute care hospitals in the state—if not for this sort of complex medical specialty center, I know I would not be here today in anywhere near the shape I am in.

There is no other place that offers the ventilator help I received during respiratory therapy. The healing arts therapy re-taught me how do fine motor skill work that allowed me to return to my current job. You might be interested in knowing that I can actually run in a straight line for great distances; last fall, I participated in a 5K race with one of my Bethesda physical therapists.

I have heard that the budget cuts being proposed for health care would translate into an \$8 million dollar loss to Bethesda Hospital. How can a place as unique as Bethesda, who treats the sickest of the sick (from brain injury patients to car accident survivors to people like me) continue to offer this specialized care by specialized providers without funding and staffing? Bethesda has no safety net—it is the safety net that my family and I (and more than 2,000 patients last year) have come to rely upon.

Had Bethesda Hospital not been there, what would have been my fate? I was deemed ready to leave the short-term community hospital, but no nursing home or skilled facility would accept me much less have had the medical expertise to take me as an in-patient. And, at that point, even with a spouse who is a nurse, returning home was not an option.

Today I have lots of options and a new life. I'm back to work. I pay taxes. In the last few weeks I have actually worked overtime at my state of Minnesota job preparing four different stimulus bill construction project plans that will put many Minnesotans to work within the coming months and years to come. I gladly choose to do public work, and I perform it the very best way that I know how. I am a servant leader moving at the speed of trust. This life is not what I asked for nor what my family and I had planned, but nevertheless it is a very beautiful life.

I am asking you to understand that a balanced budget without quality healthcare (and without places like Bethesda Hospital) is something we must avoid. My fluke accident happened in the blink of an eye by something as unpredictable as a change in the wind. Please do not let a change in the political winds determine whether or not someplace as special as Bethesda Hospital survives for those of us whose lives (or the life of someone we love) might change in an instant.

Thank you for your professional time and personal consideration. I am most grateful for the chance to tell my story in the hope that it will let you see how much of a state treasure Bethesda Hospital is.