

One year after PPACA: Time to advance the fight for health care justice

By Mark Dudzic

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Last month marked the one-year anniversary of the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act (PPACA). But if it is to have any meaning, this anniversary must be a time for summing up and looking ahead. It is a time to take a hard look at the accomplishments and prospects of PPACA.

PPACA today is under vicious assault from the same right-wing forces that want to deny public employees access to affordable health care, destroy the social safety net and attack workers' rights everywhere. Even if it survives this assault and is fully implemented over the next four years, it will never succeed in providing universal access to affordable, quality health care to everyone in America. Only a publicly financed Medicare-for-All single payer system can deliver on that promise. We must do more than celebrate and defend PPACA. We must complete the unfinished business of health care reform or the dream of health care justice will die.

Workers and their allies in Wisconsin and the other heartland states have shown that they are willing to fight long and hard when they are called upon to stand up for justice. It is time that we spread the Spirit of Wisconsin throughout the nation and stand in solidarity with all of those seeking to defend and expand the social safety net.

The fight for health care justice can be a uni-

fyng theme in all of these efforts. Last month, the AFL-CIO Executive Council voted to financially support the Labor Campaign for Single Payer and passed a resolution that points out that the only long-term solution to the budget deficit crisis is real health care reform on the social insurance model. Medicare itself is on the chopping block as 64 Senators (32 Republicans and 32 Democrats) recently signed a letter to President Obama calling on him to re-open talks on entitlement reform. We need to lead on this issue by showing that the best way to save Medicare is to expand it to everyone in America.

Congressman John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) has reintroduced H.R. 676 with 39 co-sponsors. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Congressman Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) will soon introduce a joint single payer bill that incorporates several labor-friendly provisions. The Vermont legislature just sent to the Senate a bill that will put the state on track to establish the first single payer system in the U.S. Seventeen other states have had single payer legislation submitted. Workers in the private sector still must fight every day to preserve affordable health care. Public workers, even in states with Democratic administrations, have seen their health benefits put on the chopping block by politicians too timid to confront Wall Street greed.

This is no time to sit on our laurels. Labor must take the lead in building a powerful movement to confront corporate power and extend health care justice to everyone in America. ■

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