

Nurses' guide to single-payer reform

MASS-CARE celebrates as Health Care Committee passes language specific to S.686

On March 18, the Joint Committee on Health Care passed the following language specific to S.686 in executive session:

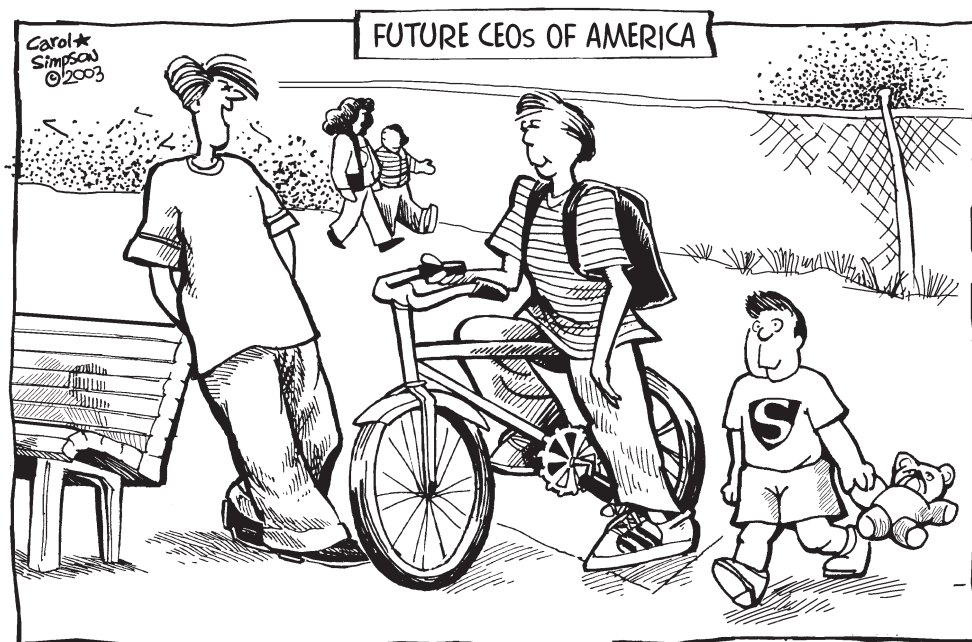
"The committee moves to substitute the text of S.686, An Act to Establish a Massachusetts Health Care Trust, with the following:

The division of health care finance and policy shall study the fiscal impact, including the total cost of implementation, the potential long-term costs and savings and an estimate of the amount of new state revenue necessary, if any, for implementation, of pending Senate Bill Number 686, establishing a Massachusetts health care trust. The division shall report the results of its findings to the Joint Committee on Health Care by November 1, 2004."

The incorporation of this language now means that S.686 will be passed to the Senate for further action. The MASS-CARE statewide committee found this language to be very acceptable, and it announced in a subsequent media advisory that it was excited to see S.686 moving to the Senate.

MASS-CARE also expressed its gratitude to all of those who have been supporting this initiative, and asked that they continue showing their support by contacting a few of the members of the Health Care Committee and thanking them for their action. Committee members, their home town and phone numbers are:

- Sen. Richard Moore of Uxbridge at 617-722-1420
- Sen. Jarrett Barrios of Cambridge at 617-722-1650
- Sen. Harriette Chandler of Worcester at 617-722-1544
- Sen. Susan Fargo of Lincoln at 617-722-1572
- Sen. Susan Tucker of Andover at 617-722-1612
- Sen. Bruce Tarr of Gloucester at 617-722-1600
- Rep. Peter Koutoujian of Waltham at 617-722-2130
- Rep. Christine Canavan of Brockton at 617-722-2320
- Rep. William Galvin of Canton at 617-722-2220
- Rep. Colleen Garry of Dracut at 617-722-2582
- Rep. Thomas Golden Jr. of Lowell at 617-722-2575
- Rep. Rachel Kaprielian of Watertown at 617-722-2430
- Rep. Kathleen Teahan of Whitman at 617-722-2130
- Rep. Patricia Haddad of Somerset at 617-722-2692
- Rep. Robert Coughlin of Dedham at 617-722-2130
- Rep. Shirley Gomes of Harwich at 617-722-2803
- Rep. Susan Gifford of Wareham at 617-722-2090 ■



"I know. Let's beat up some kid whose parents can't afford health insurance."

Quotable

"My husband and I lost our insurance coverage on August 31, when the company my husband worked at for 30 years went bankrupt. Right now we have COBRA to cover us, but in December, when the company is out of money, we will be uninsured. I have looked at what our options are for insurance and I've realized, there is nothing out there for us. We are too old, and no one will take my husband because he has had a heart attack."

—Dorothy and Michael Wallace, ages 57
Granite City, Ill.
www.amsa.org/hp/uhcinitiative.cfm

Calling for reform

A front-line RN explains why universal health care is essential

Donna Kelly Williams, RN and MNA member, joined other advocates of health care reform in front of City Hall in Cambridge on March 4. The gathering was part of a statewide campaign called "Health Care Action Day," which aimed to draw attention to the need for a statewide, universal health care system that would cover all Massachusetts citizens. Kelly Williams spoke to the audience about what it is like to be a front-line nurse and to see the devastating effects today's health care system has on patients. She was able to provide the following testimony:

My name is Donna Kelly Williams and I am a registered nurse at the Cambridge Health Alliance, as well as a member of the Massachusetts Nurses Association.

The MNA represents 22,000 registered nurses and health care professionals in more than 51 Massachusetts hospitals, as well as a wide array of other health care settings, including VNAs, schools, long term care facilities, clinics and public health departments.

Our members work on the front lines of the health care system, providing a real understanding of how the system works and, more importantly, how the system fails to work on behalf of patients and communities in the commonwealth.

From the perspective of nurses who work on these front lines and who spend more

time with patients and their families than any other provider group, the Massachusetts health care system is a complete and utter failure on all accounts: depriving access to those who need services and delivering inadequate to unsafe care to those who manage to obtain services.

While structured with the goal of being economically efficient, our health care system is one of the most costly in the nation. Unless dramatic changes are made, it is a system with no prospect of emerging from its current state of crisis. In fact, it is a system on the verge of total collapse.

The media headlines tell the story: emergency room diversions are on the rise in every corner of the state; the closing of community hospitals; more than 400,000 residents without health insurance coverage and thousands more underinsured; unsafe staffing levels and deplorable working conditions that are driving nurses and other providers out of health care altogether and endangering the lives of thousands of patients every day; skyrocketing prescription drug costs that leave seniors destitute or on a bus to Canada for drugs they need to maintain their health; and the closure of nursing homes and home care agencies which are further undercutting the health care safety net.

This is the picture of the health care system

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today as seen by nurses and as experienced by patients. From our perspective, it is perfectly clear: major health care reforms are desperately needed . . . and universal health care is the shining star of these reforms.

As nurses, we believe that universal access to quality health care is a basic human right of every member of our society, and that the inability to guarantee that right is evidence of a failure of our society that must be addressed.

We believe the health care system in our state is in serious crisis and in need of dramatic and comprehensive reform to secure the right of access to health care for all.

We believe the free-market, deregulated and corporatized approaches to the delivery of health care which have been embraced by the legislature and the executive branch for the last decade are an abject failure, and it is

the primary cause of the crisis we now face.

Nurses can no longer morally or ethically accept incremental approaches to reform of this system; nor can we sit by while more consultants are hired and more task forces are formed to "study" these issues with no mandate to affect fundamental change.

We simply cannot afford any more "partial solutions." The need for comprehensive reform is urgent and that reform is universal health care as detailed by MASS-CARE in its proposed legislation, Senate Bill 686: The Massachusetts Health Care Trust.

Our health care system is broken and in need of a complete and drastic overhaul. Without a commitment to the provision of health care as a socially good and basic human right for all; without a complete revamping of how we finance and administer health care to ensure we provide this right to all of our citizens; and without a system of regulations to ensure that patients receive the attention and care they require to recover from illness and injury, thousands of our citizens will suffer and many will die.

The MNA, and the thousands of nurses and health professionals it represents, call upon the state legislature to pass the Massachusetts Health Care Trust and to create a health care system that works for the betterment of our society as a result. ■