

## Include single payer in healthcare reform

The Obama administration's recent decision to exclude advocates of single payer healthcare reform from its "Health Care Summit" drew a sharp response from labor leaders around the country last month.

"President Obama indicated that his administration is committed to the passage of a new 'universal' national health care program for all Americans, and he wants it done this year," said Mark Dudzic, National Coordinator of the Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare. "For working people, and particularly the 48 million Americans currently without health insurance, this was welcome news. We also applaud the President's efforts to provide immediate relief to the growing number of unemployed workers faced with the loss of their health insurance."

"At the same time," he continued, "we are deeply concerned by the apparent failure of the administration to include a single supporter of H.R.676 among the 120 invited participants to [last month's] Health Care Reform Summit. We are calling on our supporters to call and write the White House and demand that our voice be heard."

H.R.676, the "expanded and improved Medicare for All" Act, was re-introduced this year by Congressman John Conyers and has 59 congressional co-sponsors. Because it eliminates the private insurance industry from profiting from people's misfortunes and, like Medicare, establishes the federal government as the "single payer" of everyone's medical bills, H.R.676 can provide healthcare for all with no co-pays or deductibles in a fiscally prudent manner. H.R.676 has the endorsement of hundreds of state and local labor federations and local unions as well as many other civic and religious organizations.

Leaders of the Labor Campaign for Single Payer were urging Obama to consider alternatives which, like Medicare, would not rely on private, for-profit insurance companies to ration health care to the American people. "Proposals which funnel our precious healthcare dollars into the pockets of the for-profit insurance industry and other special interests will do nothing to contain and control costs or improve the quality of care," said Fernando Gapasin, president of the West Central Oregon Central Labor Council.

Labor leaders from Massachusetts have been particularly concerned that their state's law requiring all individuals to purchase private health insurance is being touted as a model for the nation. "Last month 40 of my fellow union leaders wrote to President Obama to urge him to reject a Massachusetts-style plan that would

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leave private insurance companies at the center of the system through an individual mandate and expensive public subsidies supported by taxes for plans that still don't provide enough coverage. The Massachusetts plan is widely recognized as unsustainable and now that we are facing an economic crisis, it is even more problematic," said Peter Knowlton, president of the northeast region of the United Electrical Workers Union.

"If anyone should have been excluded from this summit," said Ray Stever, New Jersey State Industrial Union Council president, "it should have been the representatives of the health insurance industry. Those are the very people who caused the crisis in the first place. They will move heaven and earth to continue to deny Americans the healthcare justice that citizens of all other industrialized countries enjoy."

The Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare joined other single payer advocates and organizations in demanding that their views be represented in the growing debate over health care reform. These included the Leadership Conference for Guaranteed Healthcare, Healthcare-NOW, the All Unions Committee for Single Payer, the Physicians for a National Health Program and the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee whose co-president, Geri Jenkins, RN, recently warned, "Any reform premised on expanding the insurance-based system will likely fail, frustrate the public desire for a real solution to our healthcare crisis, and undermine the political capital the administration has earned for reform." ■

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