

Nurses from California to Maine participate in national labor forum



Representatives from the Labor Campaign for Single Payer at their annual conference.

By Sandy Eaton, RN

At the second annual conference of the Labor Campaign for Single Payer (LCSP) in early March, 15 front-line nurses and six staffers from their unions—17 percent of those registered—played an active role in hammering out labor's health care agenda for the coming year. Nurses from California, Oregon, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, New York, Massachusetts and Maine also participated.

The NNU was represented by its co-president Jean Ross from Minnesota and by Martha Kuhl from California, its secretary-treasurer. NNU's policy director, Michael Lighty, addressed the plenary on strategy. NNU's political director and its DC lobbyist also played active roles. Donna Smith, whose family was featured in Michael Moore's exposé "SiCKO" and who is now NNU's single-payer organizer, played a strong role as well. NNU organizing staff from Illinois and Ohio also contributed.

"[This] meeting highlighted the serious grassroots organizing that thousands of workers and their unions are doing to change the terms of the debate on health care reform," said Kuhl. "Many unions need to expand member-to-member education so that workers understand that an improved and expanded Medicare for All is the best solution to the health care crisis. We emphasized the need for union activists to

increase their efforts to push some labor leaders to actually lead on this issue."

Other speakers at the conference included national union officers, AFL-CIO Executive Council members, AFL-CIO state federation and central labor council presidents along with many other major union leaders.

Over the course of the weekend meeting, delegates heard presentations on "Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the Future," "Strategies to Move Forward," "Impact of the Health Care Crisis on Collective Bargaining" and "How to Deepen Labor's Support for Medicare for All." Congressman John Conyers, the lead sponsor of HR 676, participated in the entire conference and gave a keynote presentation on "Current Legislative Issues and the Future of HR 676."

Delegates were also treated to a rousing speech from U.S. Rep. Donna Edwards, D-Md.. "Just because a health care reform bill is passed and signed into law this year doesn't mean that our fight is over," she said. "We've got to redouble our efforts for legislation that will provide real health care for all."

Most nurses who attended participated in a nurses' caucus, where they grappled with such questions as how to help rank-and-file nurses realize the relationship between their ability to deliver proper care and the urgency of fundamental health care reform.

Kuhl and Sandy Eaton, chair of the NNU's Legislative Council and secretary of MNA's Congress on Health Policy & Legislation, were re-elected to the campaign's steering committee. Ross was elected to this LCSP working body. ■

On the Cover: MNA members picketing at Morton Hospital in Taunton. From left, Jen Rogers, Aleta Bezanson, Kara Melb, Christina Leone, Marie Breen, Joyce Wilkin and Ann May

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