

Medicare for All gets big boost in St. Louis

Mass. well represented; leading role of nurses recognized

More than 150 labor leaders and activists from 31 states assembled in St. Louis in January to launch the "Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care." The MNA's five-member delegation, led by president Beth Piknick, shared their experiences and insights at the gathering, sparking discussion of the "Massachusetts model" and similar hybrids—all of which leave the commercial insurance industry at the heart of health care.

California, Illinois, Maine, New York, Ohio, Oregon and Texas also sent nurse delegates. The Massachusetts delegation included representatives from nine diverse labor organizations and held its own private caucus to strategize on its special role in opposing weak compromise proposals for health care reform that are not universal, sustainable or fair.

Seven out of 10 Massachusetts representatives in Congress are co-sponsors to Rep. John Conyers' "Medicare for All" bill, H.R.676. Sen. Edward Kennedy has long been recognized as a champion of national health insurance, but the single-payer solution to the crisis in access, affordability and quality in health care has been declared off the table by Washington insiders, even though, as California Nurses Association executive director Rose Ann DeMoro put it, "Single payer is the only reform in health care that has a constituency." Delegates pledged to pick up the pace through petitioning, letter writing, call-ins and constituent visits.

The conference delegates approved a mission statement that began: "The primary purpose of the Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health

Care is to increase grassroots labor support for HR.676 as an essential element in winning the support of Congress to enact the National Health Care Act 'Medicare for All' as the public policy of this country because we believe that health care is a human right."

Participants also hammered out a list of possible actions that might help to stimulate the rank and file to build pressure within the labor movement and—through coalition work—in the larger community for real health care reform. The outline of a structure to coordinate the campaign was accepted.

The delegates also received a brief introduction to a new study, "Single-payer/Medicare for All: An Economic Stimulus Package for the Nation," from Don DeMoro, director of the Institute for Health and Socioeconomic Policy. "Through direct and supplemental expenditures, health care is already a uniquely dominant force in the US economy. If we were to expand our present Medicare system to cover all Americans, the economic stimulus alone would create an immense engine that would help drive our national economy for decades to come," he said.

The MNA Board of Directors on Jan. 15 voted to join the campaign, and appointed Sandy Eaton and Sandra Hottin to represent Massachusetts nurses on its steering committee.

Meanwhile, on the local front, Mass-Care, the Massachusetts Campaign for Single Payer Health Care, has re-filed its updated "Massachusetts Health Care Trust" bill for the 2009-2010 legislative session. ■



New England delegates in St Louis: Back row, from left, Beth Piknick, MNA president; Peter Knowlton, UE Northeast Region president; Sandy Eaton, MNA Region 5 chair; Catherine Bunker, MSNA/NNOC, Bar Harbor, Maine; front row, from left, George Moore, floor steward, UE Local 234, St. Johnsbury, Vt.; Traven Leyshon, President, Washington-Orange-Lamoille CLC, Middlesex, Vt.

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