

Huge victory for single payer ballot question

In 2008, we witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of grass-roots political activity in Massachusetts, as well as across the nation. Activists in 10 state representative districts across the commonwealth placed a non-binding question on their ballots to press the case for a just health care system. On Nov. 4, the local ballot initiative supporting single payer health care and opposing individual mandates passed by landslide margins in all districts where it appeared. The measure passed with margins ranging from 65 percent in the 5th Middlesex district to 83 percent in the 3rd Hampshire district. With almost all precincts tallied, roughly 73 percent of over 187,000 voters in the 10 districts voted "yes" to the following:

"Shall the representative from this district be instructed (1) to support legislation that establishes health care as a human right regardless of age, state of health or employment status, by creating a single payer health insurance system that is comprehensive, cost effective, and publicly provided to all residents of Massachusetts, and (2) to oppose any laws penalizing the uninsured for failing to obtain health insurance."

Here are the numbers and winning percentages for all of the voting districts where the question was on the ballot:

District	No	Yes	% in favor
1st Barnstable	6,252	13,341	68
4th Barnstable	6,897	17,262	71
Barnstable, Dukes, Nantucket	5,702	15,816	74
2nd Franklin	4,162	12,471	75
1st Hampshire	4,085	16,395	80
3rd Hampshire	2,571	11,437	82
5th Middlesex	6,263	11,896	66
12th Middlesex	4,384	11,556	72
4th Plymouth	5,312	15,381	74
10th Suffolk	5,221	19,757	79
Total	49,423	132,472	72.8

Swelling support for "Medicare for All"

With the tremendous ferment leading to and growing out of the coming changes in Washington, increasingly serious debate and action on health care are the order of the day.

The United States National Health Insurance Act, HR.676, introduced by Representative John Conyers, establishes a

unique American national universal health insurance program. The bill would create a publicly financed, privately delivered healthcare system that uses the already existing Medicare program by expanding and improving it to all US residents and all residents living in US territories. HR.676 currently has 93 co-sponsors in addition to Conyers. H.R.676 has already been endorsed by 474 union organizations in 49 states including 20 national unions, 117 central labor councils and 39 state AFL-CIOs.

Delegates to the Massachusetts AFL-CIO's annual COPE convention in Andover voted in September to endorse H.R.676. John Horgan, IBEW Local 2222 steward at Verizon, had made a presentation on H.R.676 to the state COPE Committee which voted to endorse H.R.676. The COPE Committee's endorsement was approved by the state federation's executive board and passed unanimously by the convention upon a motion by Robert Haynes, state federation President. Horgan had earlier been responsible for several endorsements of H.R.676 by a number of Massachusetts Central Labor Councils. MNA officially endorsed "Medicare for All" in 2007.

The Leadership Conference on Guaranteed Health Care met in November at the AFL-CIO's Washington headquarters. Massachusetts was represented by Mass-Care's Benjamin Day. This national coalition will unite all single payer groups who sign on to its statement of purpose, and work through an executive committee of leading national organizations and a number of sub-committees on which any member organization can sit. The California Nurses Association has agreed to match every dollar that any other organization raises to staff a national office. The co-conveners of the conference—the CNA, Physicians for a National Health Program, Healthcare-NOW and Progressive Democrats of America—are responsible for getting this organization off the ground initially.

Parallel to this, Labor for Single Payer will be launched at a conference in St. Louis on Jan. 10 and 11. All labor organizations that support the passage of H.R.676 are invited to attend and participate in launching a dynamic campaign for the only workable solution to today's healthcare crisis, working within and through the labor movement. MNA is sending a delegation to St. Louis. ■

the Massachusetts nurse

ISSN 0163-0784: USPS 326-050

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Mission Statement: The Massachusetts Nurse will inform, educate and meet member needs by providing timely information on nursing and health care issues facing the nurse in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. Through the editorial voice of the newsletter, MNA seeks to recognize the diversity of its membership and celebrate the contributions that members make to the nursing profession on the state, local and national levels.

Published 10 times annually, in January, February, March, April, May, June, July/August, September, October and November/December by the Massachusetts Nurses Association, 340 Turnpike Street, Canton, MA 02021.

Subscription price: \$20 per year

Foreign: \$25 per year

Single copy: \$3.00

Periodical postage paid at Canton, MA and additional mailing offices.

Deadline: Copy submitted for publication consideration must be received at MNA headquarters by the first day of the month prior to the month of publication. All submissions are subject to editing and none will be returned.

Postmaster: Send address corrections to Massachusetts Nurse, Massachusetts Nurses Association, 340 Turnpike Street, Canton, MA 02021.

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