



MINNESOTA UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE COALITION

E-NEWSLETTER July 2009

These may be the hazy, lazy days of summer for many . . . but not for health care reform advocates! There are daily twists and turns in the national debate, with no clear consensus yet on what type of reform will actually pass through Congress and be signed by the

President. Even though single-payer has been declared “off the table,” advocates across the country continue to challenge the misleading rhetoric spoken by opponents of reform. In Minnesota, we have taken steps to clarify the issue of “public option” at the national level, and to preserve the option of a single-payer system at the state level. Read this newsletter to find out more, and join us in the cause!

*Lisa Nilles
Board Secretary*

What is a “public plan option”?

A “public plan option” is a government-administered insurance program (like Medicare) that would be available to certain Americans. Medicare is widely known to be the most efficient, beloved health insurance program in the United States. Theoretically then, introducing a similarly efficient “public plan option” into the mix would force health insurance companies to become more efficient in order to keep business, resulting in lower costs, and thus an increased likelihood of insurance that would be affordable for everyone.

Sound good? [72% of Americans think so](#). Policy leaders differ, and waffle, on what they think. Some days the media reports that Obama is holding firm to a public plan option, other days he is reported to hint at compromise. The “Blue Dog Democrats” (conservative House Democrats) have said “NO DEAL” to a public plan and the [Congressional Progressive Caucus has laid out principles of a “robust public plan”](#) -without which they may vote against reform.



What does MUHCC think of the “public plan option”?

We are wary. A bill that promotes a strong public plan option could indeed be a stepping stone to a national single-payer system. A bill that enables a weak public option, particularly if coupled with an individual mandate (a law requiring all Americans to hold a health insurance policy) could lead to massive tax subsidies of private insurance policies.

In cooperation with other Minnesota health reform advocates and Representative Keith Ellison, we have agreed on a set of criteria that are essential for a strong public option to succeed:

1. The program must have a large pool of enrollees on the day it begins operations. This pool would be created in part by the automatic enrollment of Medicaid and SCHIP enrollees and a large portion of the uninsured.
2. The program should be open *immediately* to all Americans (including large employers).
3. The program should be authorized but not required to use Medicare’s payment rates for providers and to negotiate with drug manufacturers.
4. Both the public program and insurance companies should be required to cover a comprehensive set of benefits.
5. Enrollees in the public program should receive subsidies that make the purchase of insurance from the public program affordable for all Americans.

6. Premium payments to all insurers should be adjusted to reflect differences in the health status of their enrollees to protect all insurers against adverse selection (higher costs caused by enrolling a disproportionate share of the sick).
7. Require providers to accept enrollees of the public program.
8. Prohibit the public program from limiting enrollees' choice of provider and giving providers incentives to deny care.
9. Ensure that states retain the right to establish their own single-payer systems.

The first 6 principles were derived from Jacob Hacker, the principle proponent of the public option. [Read his recent paper here.](#)

To stay informed . . .

For those of you who want to keep abreast of developments in more depth, we recommend these sites:

[HEALTHCARE-NOW](#)-a national single-payer coalition with daily updates on the news

[HealthReform.gov](#)- the White House health reform website

[Bill Moyers Journal](#)- Moyers has provided exceptional coverage of the health care debate. View his website for transcripts of key programs testimony and links to sites that track the influence of money in Congress

[Minnesota Single-Payer Discussion Forum](#)- This is a moderated forum, and oriented to policy specifics. Use this link to join.

[You can download a comparison of the three congressional committee proposals here](#)

An insider tells the ugly truth about the insurance industry!

Wendell Potter, former Vice President of Communications of Cigna, the country's 4th largest insurer offered an insider's view of the industry in testimony before the US Senate Commerce Committee. "I know from personal experience that members of Congress and the public have good reason to question the honesty and trustworthiness of the insurance industry. Insurers make promises they have no intention of keeping, they flout regulations designed to protect consumers, and they make it nearly impossible to understand — or even to obtain — information we need. As you hold hearings and discuss legislative proposals over the coming weeks, I encourage you to look very closely at the role for-profit insurance companies play in making our health care system both the most expensive and one of the most dysfunctional in the world."



[View Potter's full testimony](#)

[Read a transcript](#)

[Watch Potter on Bill Moyers' Journal](#)

TAKE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF SINGLE-PAYER

Medicare: Made in America-DC Rally and Lobby Day July 30th.

HEALTHCARE NOW- a single-payer coalition is sponsoring a rally and lobby day in Washington DC on July 30th in honor of Medicare's 44th birthday. [Find out more.](#)

If we find out about buses from Minnesota to D.C., we will post it on [muhcc.org](#)

Single-Payer is on the Table in Minnesota

The legislative session is over but MUHCC is busy organizing and working toward next session. Over one-third of the Minnesota legislature has signed on in support of the Minnesota Health Plan but there are many more legislators to reach. We anticipate four committee hearings in the 2010 session. This is a great time to contact *your* legislator in support of the Minnesota Health Plan. Let's line up the votes now! [Click here for pointers](#)



Write or call Senator Al Franken and ask him to uphold his campaign commitment to support states' ability to devise their own single-payer plans. Senator Al Franken 320 Hart Senate Office Building Washington DC 20510,

202-224-5641



Mobilize Support for the Minnesota Health Plan

Participate in a phone bank. Give supporters an update and make sure that they contact their legislators in support of the Minnesota Health Plan. It's easy and fun. [Find out more and sign up here!](#)

Be a sustaining member of MUHCC with a monthly pledge. [Donate Here](#)

The faces of MUHCC

We are pleased to announce that staff member Amy Lange is now Executive Director, and, to help Amy in her innumerable tasks, we have hired Khalid Adam as administrative assistant. Khalid is an economics and math student at Augsburg College. Amy Lange can be reached at amyL@muhcc.org; and Khalid can be reached at info@muhcc.org

Congratulations Amy, and Welcome Khalid!

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