

Healthcare-NOW! Conference Calls On Congress to Start Health Bill from Scratch

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Over 125 Healthcare-NOW! members at our 2009 National Strategy Conference voted to oppose the current Congressional health insurance legislation and asks that our legislators start from scratch in order to create health reform that addresses the fundamental problems with healthcare in this nation and creates a universal, single-payer health system that is based on improved Medicare for all.

Like you, we are hungry for change. However, at this crucial point in the history of our nation, we must ask ourselves if we are willing to accept any change in order to say that something was accomplished, or will we stand up and demand effective change that will end suffering and save lives.

We are seriously concerned by the current healthcare crisis in the United States. We are saddened by the number of people who are suffering, facing bankruptcy or foreclosure, and dying prematurely because they cannot afford or have access to needed medical treatment.

However, Healthcare-NOW! believes that we should avoid action based on fear. Review of the current health insurance reform legislation reveals that it resembles health reforms that have recently been tried and have failed at the state level, namely Massachusetts. Instead, we should act based on the evidence of what works. Medicare has lower administrative costs and higher satisfaction among enrollees than private insurance.

We anticipated the healthcare debate this year would focus on the true stakeholders: patients and those who care for them. But improved Medicare for All (single-payer) was pushed off the table, by Congress and the private health industry, preventing the American people from learning how access to quality, universal care can be financed without increasing cost to the public.

Pushing single-payer off the table has resulted in deeply flawed legislation by the House and Senate which amounts to a massive bailout of the profit-making health industries that will increase their ability to lobby and influence legislators in the future. At the same time, patients will receive little in the way of protection or improved ability to afford needed healthcare. The legislation is designed to fail and in the meantime, will waste billions of dollars and delay the process of creating effective health reform.

Therefore, Healthcare-NOW! opposes the current health legislation for the following reasons:

1. During the time that it will take for the health insurance legislation to begin (2013 in the House version and 2014 in the Senate version), tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Americans will die.
2. Millions of people will remain uninsured: 17 million in the House version and 24 million in the Senate version.
3. Medical bankruptcies will continue as families will face out-of-pocket costs up to \$10,000 in addition to the cost of premiums and the cost of uncovered services.
4. People who are uninsured will suffer the further indignity of being forced to pay a fine which may be as high as 2.5% of their income (House version).
5. The number of people who are underinsured will increase. There is no guarantee that premiums will be affordable even for those who qualify for federal subsidies. It offers a “public option” so small and weak (and estimated to be more expensive than private insurance) that it is set up to serve as an example of failure.
6. People will continue to be consigned to only receiving the quality of care that they can afford. Instead of a standardized benefit plan that covers all necessary care, people will have to choose from a tiered set of plans. The least expensive plans will cover only 60% of necessary care and patients will be required to pay the balance.
7. The legislation will not control healthcare costs and will increase the waste in healthcare spending. The regulation of insurance companies, which is predicted to fail by industry whistleblowers, will be expensive to enforce. The “exchange” will add another level of bureaucracy which in Massachusetts has added a 4% surcharge to each insurance premium.
8. Private health insurance will be given 30 million more customers, and its stranglehold on the healthcare industry will be even greater. The legislation transfers hundreds of billions of public dollars to private insurance companies. Between \$447 and \$605 billion in public dollars (depending on the Senate or House version) will be given to the private insurers in the form of subsidies.
9. The bill writes into law protection for the drug manufacturers from having to deal with the collective purchasing power of the American people. Pharmaceutical corporations have already raised prices on brand name prescriptions by 9% this year. Biotech firms receive a windfall 12 year patent on new pharmaceuticals.
10. The legislation continues to allow discrimination based on age and immigration status. Older enrollees can be charged up to twice as much as younger enrollees. And enrollees will be required to prove citizenship in order to receive subsidies. Non-citizens will be required to bear the full cost of purchasing insurance.
11. In order to reach a bare majority to pass the bill, the House accepted limits on the reproductive healthcare rights of women beyond current stringent federal restrictions.

We call on Congress to start from scratch. We believe that we have the resources in the United States to create a national health system that will improve the health of the people of our nation. We believe that being ranked 37th in the world for health outcomes is unacceptable and that we, as a nation, can do much better than this. We believe that

improving and expanding Medicare to all people is the simplest and quickest way to achieve our goal of universal and financially-sustainable healthcare.

The mission of Healthcare-NOW! is to educate and advocate for a national publicly-funded health system: improved Medicare for all. We will continue to build the Medicare for all movement until we reach the day when all who live in the United States receive the same health security that is a right in other industrialized nations. We welcome all people who support healthcare reform to join with us in this movement. Together, we will succeed.