



## COACT brings state-wide campaign for MN Health Plan to Central Minnesota

### Legislators praised at Farm Picnic for supporting the Health Plan

Wearing stickers saying "Minnesota Health Plan, YES We Can!" at COACT's Farm Picnic in August, over 100 Central Minnesotans applauded their district's state legislators for voting for and signing on to the single-payer health plan bill. The Picnic, held every August for 28 years, has become a traditional rural life celebration in the farm community of Pierz.

Receiving constituent praise were District 12 Senator Paul Koering, Republican, Ft. Ripley, who courageously crossed party lines to vote for the Plan last session, and 12B Rep. Al Doty, DFL, Royalton, who is one of the Plan's 60 co-singers. 12A Rep. John Ward, DFL, Brainerd, and 11B Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba, DFL, Long Prairie, are also co-signers.

Business and farm leaders joined in by promoting the Health Plan as the answer for main-street businesses and family farm operations. Thom Petersen of the Minnesota Farmers Union said the Plan is needed to alleviate the high cost of health insurance premiums, deductibles and co-pays, which are among farmers' worst cash flow problems.

Nancy Breymeier, member of the Metropolitan Independent Business Alliance (MIBA) and owner of a St. Paul business, said city and rural businesses need the Plan because rising health insurance costs have surpassed taxes as their biggest problem. Both organizations, along with COACT, are members of the Minnesota Universal Health Care Coalition.

During the weeks leading up to the Farm Picnic, COACT members visited over 140 area businesses with Minnesota Health Plan handout cards. They were Franciscan Sister Ruth Lentner of Little Falls, Ken Christianson of Royalton, and dairy farmers Jeff Kunstleben, Albany, and Rod Boser, Pierz. The handout cards asked owners: "should health insurance be the 'business of business'?", to which many owners answered "no" because they had to drop the costly coverage in order to stay in business.

### Franciscan Sisters host Little Falls screening of *SiCKO*

Preceding the August Farm Picnic, the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls hosted an April screening of *SiCKO* at their center, which was coordinated by COACT board member Sister Ruth Lentner and President Charlie Quick.

Despite torrential afternoon rain followed by evening snow, audiences of 35 and 25 people saw and discussed the Michael Moore documentary as it applies to their problems with HMOs.

Several related that HMOs are not approving medical care prescribed by their doctors, even though they are paying higher premiums. Others mentioned relatives and friends prolonging and avoiding care due to lack of coverage and no money to directly pay for care.

Following an explanation of the Minnesota Health Plan by Executive Director Don Pylkkanen, most in the audience said they would be willing to pay an affordable premium to the state for permanent, guaranteed coverage as defined in the Plan. They took postcards to send to their legislators to say they are willing to do this.

The Farm Picnic and *SiCKO* screening will be followed by more outreach this fall to continue building public support for the Plan in Greater Minnesota.

Organizing meetings in targeted legislative districts is the basis of the statewide campaign for the Health Plan, which came to the State Fair at the Farmers Union building, Air America radio booth, and Green Party table where hundreds of people signed the petition of support.

*You can do your part by signing and sending the enclosed postcard to your state legislator with your comments on why the Plan must be enacted.*



Executive Dir. Don Pylkkanen and Board Sec. Sister Ruth Lentner greet public at Little Falls Franciscan Sisters screening of *SiCKO*.

### **14<sup>th</sup> Annual Members Meeting** **Saturday, October 31, 2009**

**COACT Conference Room**  
**2469 University Avenue, St. Paul**  
**Registration 9:30 AM**  
**Board Elections 11 AM**  
**FREE Lunch 12 Noon**

## Should health insurance be “the business of business?”

“Am I in the health insurance business or the music business?” asks John Kolstad, Minneapolis, CEO of Mill City Music and member of the Metropolitan Independent Alliance. “We business owners wonder about what business we’re in these days, because we seem to spend more of our budgets and paperwork on health insurance than on our own products and services.” This also sums up the attitude of most Central Minnesota business owners visited by COACT members this summer with the following facts:

### **Business can no longer afford to carry the U.S. health insurance system on its back**

- Health insurance surpassed taxes as the number one business problem. (National Federation of Independent Business)
- Highly publicized Health Savings Accounts (HSAs), promoted by the Bush administration, have enrolled only 5% of employees due to costly employee deductibles. (Kaiser Family Foundation)
- Only half of employers contribute to employees’ HSAs. (Kaiser Family Foundation)
- Since 2001, health insurance premiums increased 59%. Employee contributions increased 57%.
- 60% of the 47 million Americans without health insurance are independent business owners. (NFIB) Average family health insurance \$12,106.
- 92% of businesses say they will increase workers share toward their company health insurance plans; 45% will reduce employee health benefits; 14% will drop coverage. (USA Today, Oct. 2003)

### **Rising health insurance costs suppress economic growth and are a major source of labor strikes.**

- Rising costs (1) slow job growth, (2) suppress wages, (3) undercut pension funds, (4) make U.S. firms less competitive in the world market, and (5) produce severe, budget problems for federal and state governments. (National Coalition on Health Care.)
- Employers have reduced hiring due to rising health insurance premiums. (London Business School)
- Rising cost of employee health insurance is the major cause of strikes by the United Food and Commercial Workers union in California. (UFCW)

**Single-payer gets health insurance “off the back business” so they can compete.** Canadian CEOs of DaimlerChrysler, GM, and Ford support it. (Public Citizen Health Research Group.)

- GM, DaimlerChrysler, and Ford spend \$1200-\$1400 less in making cars in Canada than in the U.S. due to Canadian single-payer health care.
- Single-payer in Canada is an “economic asset, not a burden”, said the CEO of Toronto Dominion Bank. “In an era of globalization, [it’s] a competitive advantage.”

## COACT helps get majority party to make Health Plan its top priority

Momentum escalated for the Minnesota Health Plan with the legislature’s majority party, the DFL, making it their top priority with a resounding resolution in September, due in part to the work of COACT and the Minnesota Universal Health Care Coalition. COACT and MUHCC are non-partisan and welcome support for the Plan from all parties. In fact, the Plan’s bill passed out of the Senate Health Committee on a bi-partisan vote last session.

COACT President Charlie Quick and Executive Director Don Pylkkanen and MUHCC’s Santwana Dasgupta started mustering support by appealing to individual delegates at the state convention last June. Due to confusion in the convention’s balloting, the resolution was not voted priority status, even though it received the most votes of all resolutions at the precinct caucuses in March.

Therefore, COACT and MUHCC members again made the case for the resolution by flyering at the party’s September central committee meeting, which garnered overwhelming votes for it. The resultant endorsement by acclamation propels the Health Plan into the upcoming legislative session. Although endorsement does not bind DFL legislators, it has created strong expectation in the party and general public that they work to enact the Plan.

### **Economic crisis means Minnesota must enact its own Health Plan**

The dominance of the economic crisis over Washington means Minnesota must enact its own Health Plan. Analysts on the right and left concur that the Conyers’ single-payer universal health care bill (HR 676) is down the list of federal priorities, regardless of who is elected president.

“It’s up to us. Food, fuel, home mortgage, and health coverage are the major expenses breaking the budgets of Minnesotans, said COACT Vice President Steve Nelson at September’s board meeting. “COACT and MUHCC can’t do much about the first three, but we have the Minnesota Health Plan as the solution to unaffordable health coverage,” he said.

“We don’t have much money anymore to keep paying the HMOs, said dairy farmer Jeff Kunstleben. “But we have the votes, if we all pull together, to get our Plan enacted, which would sure help relieve the pressure on our family budgets.”

“If failed Wall Street investment banks are being nationalized to save the finance industry, isn’t it time to replace the failed HMOs with the Health Plan for the sake of our families, farms, and businesses?” board member Ken Christianson asked. “Supporting our campaign to enact the Plan is one of the soundest investments which can be made these days.”