



Health Plan, insurance costs, farmers' milk prices headline COACT Farm Picnic

Minnesota Health Plan winning public support during legislative interim

Following its victories out of two Senate committees last session, the Minnesota Health Plan bill for single-payer health care is winning public support during the legislative interim. Minnesota Universal Health Care Coalition (MUHCC) and COACT are bringing the Plan to parades, picnics, county fairs, and town hall meetings this summer where constituents are telling their state legislators to vote for the bill.

Meanwhile, volunteers, using COACT's phone bank, are getting constituents in key legislative districts to call their legislators for their YES votes in committees next session. "Constituent phone calls show that people want single-payer over bogus proposals from the health insurance industry, which is not being told by the media and health insurance industry propaganda," said COACT president and IBEW 110 electrician Charlie Quick.

"Regardless of the health care politics and confusion coming out of Washington, we in Minnesota have a bill gaining traction toward enactment of our own state health plan," he said.

Farm Picnic leads the way for MN Health Plan in Central Minnesota

One hundred fifty Central Minnesotans applauded the Minnesota Health Plan and its chief authors, Senator John Marty and Representative David Bly, at COACT's 29th Farm Picnic in Pierz, Sunday, August 23. They were joined by area legislators Senator Paul Koering and Representative Al Doty, along with Minnesota Farmers Union Government Relations Director Thom Petersen. Kathy Langer, Director of Rural Life of the St. Cloud Diocese, gave the invocation which invoked the faith-based creed of everyone's right to health care.

Due to COACT-generated calls, Senator Koering initially voted in committee for the bill in the 2008 session, which gave it bi-partisan support; but he switched to a NO vote last session. He incorrectly stated that single-payer is not saving money in counties that bypass HMOs and do county-based (direct) purchasing. We informed him that the decrease is due to less funding from the Department of Human Services and not due to single-payer (direct purchasing of services), which is more cost efficient than having HMOs administer the programs.

The Center for Rural Affairs reports that twice as many rural residents are uninsured and underinsured compared to urban residents, which makes enactment of the Health Plan especially important to the folks who attended the Picnic.

Farm recession fueled by high health coverage costs and low milk prices

Soaring health insurance costs are as damaging to Minnesota's rural economy as bad weather and low milk prices, said COACT members who addressed the farm recession at the Farm Picnic.

"Health insurance plans are denying client claims, and high premiums are forcing others to drop coverage," said COACT board member Sister Ruth Lentner of the Franciscan Sisters, Little Falls. "Costly medical bills are the leading cause of bankruptcies, which is worsened by low farm income due to falling milk prices," she said.

The farmers' indebtedness is spreading to the area's co-ops and other farm businesses, which can't collect on the bills. "In order to pay what they owe to their co-ops, some farmers aren't getting their milk checks," said COACT dairy farmer Rod Boser of Pierz. "It's gotten so bad that some farmers are taking out loans to pay the interest on their principle."

No market competition in both dairy processing and health insurance industry

"After factoring in the rising costs of production over the years, dairy farmers are being paid the same for their milk as they were paid in the early 1970s," said Jeff Kunstleben, COACT board member and Albany area dairy farmer.

"Lack of market competition in both the dairy processing and health insurance industries is driving down our pay price as our health coverage keeps rising. The Minnesota Health Plan would greatly relieve the coverage part of the equation, which has become a major operating cost for us and other businesses."



COACT Board Member Jeff Kunstleben and daughters Belle (middle) and Erin at their Albany area dairy farm.

Senator Marty lays out reform principles

"I don't care what the plan is called, or if someone else has another proposal, just as long as it keeps Minnesotans healthy and provides the best quality and affordable care," Senator John Marty told the crowd at the August 23rd Farm Picnic.



Sen. Paul Koering, front left, and others hear Sen. Marty lay out principles for a health system that works for patients, not HMOs.

He said for any proposal to work, it must 1) ensure all Minnesotans get high quality care, regardless of income; 2) not restrict, delay, or deny care, or reduce quality to hold down costs; 3) reduce costs through efficiency and reduction of bureaucracy; 4) cover all necessary care; 5) allow choice of providers; 6) be funded through premiums based on ability to pay, so as not to deny care; 7) focus on preventive care to improve health and reduce costs from untreated illnesses; 8) ensure an adequate number of health professionals and facilities; 9) continue state's lead in medical education, research, and technology; 10) pay providers adequately



Direct payments to providers will get the 800 lb. insurance gorilla off our backs



Rep. David Bly, next to insurance gorilla, explains Plan's savings.

The Minnesota Health Plan allows us to pay providers directly for our care, rather than have health insurance companies eat up 30 percent of our premium dollars, Representative David Bly told the crowd.

Financing of the plan would be based on what some people have described as "single-payer", which would be one non-profit payer paying the bills at low administrative overhead. Revenues for the plan would come from the same sources as they are now—government, businesses, and individuals. Individuals and businesses would pay premiums, as they do now, except that they would be paid directly to the health plan trust fund, not to for-profit insurance companies.

Paying tax subsidies to private insurance companies, as some suggest, will not fix the health care mess. Subsidizing private insurance plans for low-income people will not cut waste nor contain costs. Instead, paying directly for health care through the Minnesota Health Plan will be the most fiscally responsible solution for everyone.

14th Annual Members Meeting

Saturday, October 31, 2009

St. Francis Center (Franciscan Sisters)

116 SE 8th Avenue, Little Falls 56345

Registration 9:30 AM

Board Elections 11 AM / FREE Lunch 12 Noon



