

MN Health Plan sets legislative record; bill passes two Senate Committees

71 legislators co-sign bill so far

Showing public demand for single-payer universal health care in our state, 120 of us supporters turned out February 10 to see the Minnesota Health Plan, SF118, pass out of the Senate Commerce Committee 7 to 3 for an unprecedented second legislative victory.

On January 26, 100 of us saw the bill pass out of the Senate Health Committee 8 to 5 with Senator Linda Berglin, the most powerful health care legislator at the capitol, voting for it due to constituent pressure. Prior to the hearings, COACT members in key legislative districts made calls to their Senators to get the necessary votes. (Plan's description is on back page.)

The two victories were launched by 300 of us at a capitol rally January 5 to send the message that we need a Minnesota plan because Congressional action on single-payer is highly doubtful.

The turnouts were mustered from COACT, the Minnesota Universal Health Care Coalition (MUHCC), and the Greater Minnesota Health Care Coalition, which comprise the statewide Campaign for the Minnesota Health Plan. COACT serves as MUHCC headquarters.



COACT Board Member, Barb Hill, RN, and Canvass Staff Larry Lura hold banner outside Senate Committee room February 10.

Seventy-one legislators (43% of the Senate and 31% of the House) signed on to the bill so far this session.

"These turnouts and constituent calls are telling legislators that we need a system that provides health care for people, not excessive profits for HMOs," said nurse and COACT Board Member Barb Hill as she and Canvass Staff Larry Lura held a banner outside the Senate Committee room February 10. "The severe recession makes HMOs unaffordable," Larry Lura said.

The Minnesota Health Plan allows our premium dollars to be paid directly to the doctors and hospitals for care, rather than pass through the costly HMOs that take 20 to 30 percent. The \$6 billion that is wasted annually on HMO overhead and inefficiency will be saved by direct payments to providers and by efficient management of expensive equipment and services. Everyone pays into the health trust fund, based on income, to make it affordable for everyone.

COACT leaders testify for Plan at Bemidji and Little Falls hearings

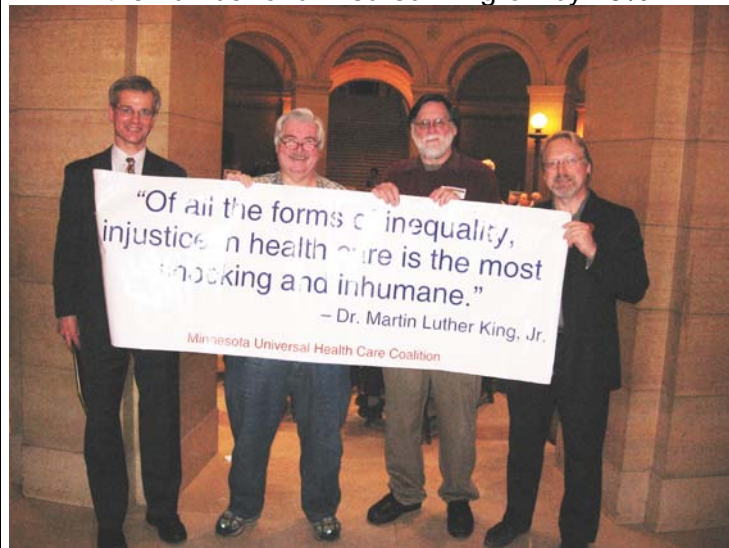
The Governor's harsh proposal to cut 113,000 Minnesotans from health care as one way to fix the state budget crisis would be unnecessary if the Minnesota Health Plan had been enacted last session, said COACT Board Member Annette Fremgen and member Bev Nouis who testified for the Plan at legislative hearings in Bemidji and Little Falls Feb 20.

At the Little Falls hearing, retired union leader Roman Witucki said he has seen how well a broad-based single-payer pool provides affordable care for employees in the pool and commended Senate District 12B Rep. Al Doty for working to make that happen for all Minnesotans with enactment of the bill. Senate District 12 Senator Paul Koering also attended, along with 11B Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba, co-signer of the bill, and other Central Minnesota legislators.

The Bemidji and Little Falls sessions were two of 15 statewide regional hearings on the state budget crisis where hospital administrators, doctors, and nurses testified on how the cuts would devastate health care.

COACT's testifiers highlighted the providers' statements by pointing to the grim proposed cuts in the absence of the Minnesota Health Plan:

- 26,000 children are included in the Governor's proposed cuts of 113,000 Minnesotans;
- hospital payments will be cut by \$365 million;
- 2,100 personal care assistants for low-income disabled and elderly will be cut;
- the number of uninsured will grow by 20%.



Chief authors of the MN Health Plan, Sen. John Marty (far left) and Rep. David Bly (far right) flank COACT Vice President Steve Nelson (left) and COACT Canvass Manager Bruce DeLong (right) at the January 5 Rally in the capitol rotunda attended by 300 supporters.

Minnesota Farmers Union hears COACT on MN Health Plan; Land Stewardship Project endorses it

COACT's Executive Director Don Pylkkanen laid out the statewide Campaign for the Minnesota Health Plan to 300 family farmers at the Minnesota Farmers Union's (MFU) Annual Convention November 22 in Minneapolis. The policy adopted by the MFU members specifically supports the bill for the Health Plan.

As a member organization of the Minnesota Universal Health Care Coalition (MUHCC), MFU wanted attending farmers to get acquainted with the Plan and the campaign to get it enacted. To illustrate the kind of campaign necessary to enact the Plan, Pylkkanen recalled the Groundswell Movement of the mid-1980s which led to a moratorium on farm foreclosures and the right of farmer-lender mediation. An MUHCC display table with handouts also helped to inform farmers.

MFU is a strong advocate for the Plan because health coverage has become a major operating expense. Farmers are as concerned about the rising costs of their insurance as they are about the pay-price for their milk, livestock, and crops.

Rural economic development is suffering due to rising costs of health insurance, according to the Center for Rural Affairs. The greater number of independent businesses and farms which can't afford coverage means less employer-based insurance for workers. A work force without a health plan is more unstable and less productive which leads to business stagnation.

Farm and rural outreach for the Plan was recently broadened when the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) joined MUHCC as an endorsing organization. LSP's endorsement was announced at their Annual Farm Breakfast on February 17. Although LSP's mission is the development of sustainable and organic farming, they, like MFU, see the lack of health coverage as a serious farm and rural problem, which needs the long-term solution of the single-payer Minnesota Health Plan.

COACT members muster votes

The Minnesota Health Plan's record passage out of two Senate Committees came down to COACT members calling their state Senators to vote YES for the bill. These constituent calls were especially important to those Senators who were still riding the fence and using the excuse that they were not hearing from their constituents. Well, 21 COACT members in a key southern Minnesota senate district and another 14 in a key northern district told their Senators to vote for the Plan. One Senator abstained rather than vote NO, and the other voted YES.

All members were grateful for the opportunity to do their part by making the calls, which shows the spirit of citizen action. COACT's phone bank will continue to be used this summer to activate more constituents to meet with, call, and write their legislators to support the Plan.

The Minnesota Health Plan

The Minnesota Health Plan (MHP) would be a single, statewide plan that would cover all Minnesotans for all medical needs. Equally important, it would reduce the need for costly medical care by providing public health, education, and early intervention.

400,000 Minnesotans lack health insurance. At least a million more have insurance, but still cannot afford to pay their medical bills due to rising premiums, co-payments, deductibles, and care not covered by their insurance. They are paying more and getting less.

Unlike other proposals, the MHP is the only plan that would provide universal care while containing costs.

Under the MHP, patients would be able to see the medical providers of their choice when they need care, and the Plan would stay with them regardless of employment or job change.

Dental care, prescription drugs, optometry, chiropractic care, mental health services, chemical dependency treatment, and medical equipment and supplies would all be covered, as well as home care services and nursing home care.

Patients would be allowed to choose their doctors and medical professionals, hospitals and clinics; but all payments, covering all the costs, would be made by the Plan, and everyone would be covered.

There would be no filling out of complex application forms, no worrying about pre-existing conditions, and no worrying about whether the treatment was covered or how you are going to pay for prescription drugs.

The Minnesota Health Plan would be prohibited from restricting, delaying, or denying care, or reducing the quality of care to save money. Instead, health care spending would be lowered through prevention, efficiency, and the elimination of paperwork.

The MHP would provide retraining for workers displaced in the transition to the single-payer system. *Medical decision-making would be restored to the doctor and patient by removing the HMO and insurance industry middle-men from determining treatment.*

The Plan would be funded by all Minnesotans, based on ability to pay, and would cover all health care costs. It would replace all employee-employer paid insurance premiums and eliminate co-pays and deductibles.

14th Annual Members Meeting

Saturday, October 31, 2009

COACT Conference Room

2469 University Ave., St. Paul

Registration 9:30 AM

Board Elections 11 AM

FREE Lunch 12 Noon

