



Single-payer Minnesota Health Plan passes Senate Judiciary Committee as constitutional

House Committee vote adds momentum

Despite Congress's failure to pass single-payer, packed hearing rooms of COACT and MUHCC members witnessed passage of the Minnesota Health Plan by the state's Senate Judiciary and House Health Committees February 11 and 23.

The near unanimous Senate Judiciary Committee vote supports the constitutionality of the single-payer elements of the Health Plan. And the 11 to 6 vote of the House Health Committee added momentum to the Plan, after it passed out of the Senate Health and Commerce Committees last session.

"The Plan's passage out of four committees during the biennium creates a significant surge of support for single-payer in our state legislature when the U.S. Congress failed to pass national single-payer, or even a public option to compete with the private health insurers," said COACT president Charlie Quick.

Furthermore, with the addition of Speaker of the House Margaret Anderson Kelliher and the Senate and House Health Committee chairs, the Plan now has 74 co-authors (one third of the legislature) with top legislative leadership to push it forward.

Could Minnesota be the next Saskatchewan?

Responding to Congress's failure to enact single-payer and Minnesota's Health Plan to do so, long-time *Star Tribune* editorial columnist Nick Coleman said "Minnesota could become the next Saskatchewan," referring to the first Canadian province to adopt single-payer, which paved the way for Canada's other provinces to create their universal single-payer system. (*Star Tribune* 3/28/10.) He noted that the politician who led Saskatchewan's reform, Tommy Douglas, was voted greatest Canadian of all time. The "Great One", Wayne Gretzky, finished 10th.



MN Nurses Association's Tom Kelly and MUHCC's Amy Lange (right) and COACT's Charlie Quick (center) witness Senate vote.

Federal insurance-based program falls short of Minnesota single-payer plan

As "the road to (you know where) is paved with good intentions", so Washington's intentions to fix health care took a U-turn from single-payer (or, at least, from a public option) back to the same commercial health insurers that created the nation's dysfunctional and costly health care system.

The federal Affordable Health Care for America Act, enacted in March, says it will achieve universal, affordable, and quality care by building on the current system through "insurance market reforms". Building on a failed foundation won't do the job, according to Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) and other national single-payer advocates. They point to the insurance-based Massachusetts Plan as an already failed state version of the national plan.

The Federal program, like the Massachusetts Plan, will be run by commercial insurers, which will expand their health care monopoly, while transferring billions of tax-payer dollars to their corporate profits. In fact, their stocks rose on news of the plan's passage.

The Minnesota Health Plan will *not* be run by private insurers and will *not* deny care; whereas, the Federal plan's prohibition against denying care has loopholes, according to PNHP.

Other Federal program shortcomings found by PNHP are 1) high co-pays and deductibles; 2) workers locked into company plans with restricted choice of providers, rising costs (similar to Massachusetts Plan), and decreasing benefits; 3) middle-income people pressured to buy private insurance for up to 9.5% of their income for only 70% average coverage; 4) 23 million uninsured Americans 9 years out, causing 23,000 deaths annually. (See comparison other side.)



COACT President Charlie Quick (left), Executive Director Don Pylkkanen (center), and Canvass Staff Larry Lura with banner for the MN Health Plan at House Health Committee hearing Feb. 23.

“Rescuing our lives from corporate control”, topic at Freeport forum

Balance shifting from citizens’ rights to corporate power under changing rules

Regaining control over life’s essentials- our health care, our communities, our property- was addressed at a town meeting March 15 in the central Minnesota town of Freeport, 25 miles northwest of St. Cloud.

COACT and long-time ally Land Stewardship Project (LSP) co-sponsored the forum which attracted an audience of over 50 attentive farmers and other concerned citizens who gathered at the area’s popular Charlie’s Café.

COACT Board Member Jeff Kunstleben, as an area family farmer, defined their concern by saying that decisions are being made farther away to where we are no longer in control of our lives. “Our medical care is decided by distant insurance industry bureaucrats, not by us and our doctors; our property can be more easily taken by corporations for their financial gain; and our right to assess questionable corporate development in our communities is being legislated away.”

Kunstleben said that the historical balance between citizens’ rights and corporate power, protected by the U.S. Constitution since its framing, was disrupted by a U. S. Supreme Court decision in 2005. The new ruling allows corporations to take property for economic development under the guise of public use, and left it up to states to protect citizens’ property rights.

In response, Minnesota’s legislature enacted a state law in 2006 to protect private land from seizure by corporations for economic development. However, power companies were exempted, he explained. This allows those companies building an enlarged power-line project through the region to use the power of eminent domain to force property owners to sign utility easements.

To protect property owners, Representative David Bly (Northfield) introduced legislation to repeal the power company exemptions, for which Kunstleben urged the audience to get their legislators’ to support.

Meanwhile, as LSP’s Paul Sobocinski explained, other legislation was introduced to remove the longstanding right of townships to use temporary moratoriums to assess corporate feedlot and other questionable proposals. COACT and LSP have been advocating for this right over the years and asked the audience to tell their legislators to oppose repealing it.

As local citizens fight for property and township rights, the health insurance industry takes 20 to 30 percent of our health care dollars for overhead and profit as they increasingly restrict and deny care. COACT’s Don Pylkkanen and MUHCC’s Jim Hart, MD, explained how the MN Health Plan will enable our health dollars to be used directly for our care rather than go to the insurance industry for their profit.



COACT’s Don Pylkkanen (left) and Jeff Kunstleben (far right) with LSP’s Paul Sobocinski at Freeport forum on citizens’ rights Mar 15

Federal Insurance Plan / MN Health Plan

Expands Medicaid and provides tax subsidies to buy private insurance to increase access.	100% of Minnesotans in the Plan.
Still, health care will be unaffordable for 23 million Americans, causing 23,000 deaths per year.	NO MINNESOTAN WILL DIE due to lack of access to health care.

Multiple plans at multiple prices.	One comprehensive plan.
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Based on private multiple-payer system with added administrative complexity of “insurance exchanges”.	Greatly reduces complexity with one plan and one payer to <u>contain costs</u> .
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Insurers required to spend no more than 20%-25% of revenue on administration.	Single-payer systems spend 2%-3% of revenue on administration.
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Coverage mandated and must be re-negotiated each year. Employers remain a primary source of health coverage.	Guaranteed care. No annual re-enrollment. No deductibles or co-pay. Not employer-based.
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Basic benefits unclear in the insurance exchanges. Current employer-based plans remain.	All necessary care, including dental, prescription drugs, mental health.
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Although insurance companies can no longer rescind care and deny coverage, they can still deny <u>claims</u> .	NO DENIAL of care due to pre-existing conditions.
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Workers locked into company plans with restricted choice of providers, rising costs, and decreasing benefits.	Patients free to choose from among all licensed providers in the state.
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15th Annual Members Meeting
Saturday, October 30, 2010, 10 AM
St. Francis Center (Franciscan Sisters)
116 SE 8th Avenue, Little Falls
Board Elections 11 AM / Free Lunch 12 Noon

