

Labor Campaign for Single-Payer

Healthcare Is A Right -- Not A Privilege

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Report on Labor Campaign for Single Payer National Meeting June 3-5, 2011 Washington, DC

Friday Afternoon Briefing

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Jos Williams at 1 PM on Friday, June 3 in the President's Room of the AFL-CIO Building in Washington, DC. National Coordinator Mark Dudzic gave an overview of the meeting agenda and logistics. He expressed regrets from a number of key leaders unable to attend the meeting including the UE and IUE/CWA delegations who are engaged in a difficult contract fight with General Electric where healthcare is (once again) a major bargaining issue.

Dudzic read from a letter from Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders who was unable to attend because of prior commitments in the state of Vermont. Senator Sanders wrote that, "I appreciate the Labor Campaign's hard work to keep this issue at the forefront of labor's agenda." He gave particular recognition to the work of the Vermont unionists in attendance—Vermont State Fed President Jill Charbonneau, Mari Cordes, President of the Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals and Jonathan Kissam of the Vermont Workers Center—for their work "[to] help our state take a very important step closer to a single payer healthcare system."

Matt Biggs, IFPTE Political and Legislative Director, gave opening remarks on behalf of IFPTE President Greg Junemann. Junemann also chairs the Labor Caucus for Single Payer which, under his leadership, has grown to nine national unions. IATSE Vice President J. Walter Cahill gave remarks on behalf of IATSE.

Representative Jim McDermott (D., WA) joined the meeting by speaker phone. He spoke of his long-term support for a single payer, Medicare-for-All solution to the healthcare crisis and his recent partnering with Senator Sanders to submit the American Health Security Act of 2011 (S.915/H.R. 1200) which has been endorsed by the AFL-CIO. He expressed his appreciation for the work of the Labor Campaign.

Jos Williams called together a panel of allies in the fight to make healthcare a right to everyone in America. Panelists made presentations on their organization's views on the current strategic moment and took questions from the participants. Panelists included:

- Katie Robbins, National Organizer, Healthcare NOW!
- Richard Fiesta, Director of Government and Political Affairs, Alliance for Retired Americans.
- Andy Coates, Physicians for a National Health Program

- Kay Tillow, All Unions Committee for Single Payer Healthcare—HR 676
- Steve Cobble, Progressive Democrats of America
- Joe Jurczak, Political Director, National Nurses United

Representative John Conyers (D., MI) joined the meeting. He spoke of his work on behalf of single payer and the current status of HR 676 which has 56 co-sponsors. He talked about the importance of connecting the fight for healthcare for all with the response to the economic crisis. He discussed his recent submission of legislation calling for a real jobs program.

Representative Dennis Kucinich arrived fresh from the House debate on his resolution to withdraw all American forces from the Libyan theater. He talked about the connection between spending on endless wars and the need to redirect resources to social needs like healthcare. He stated his support for HR 676, HR 1200 and legislation to allow states to secure the necessary waivers to implement state-based single-payer reforms. He stressed that any rational healthcare system must also encourage and support healthy lifestyles and preventive care.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka addressed the meeting and re-confirmed the AFL-CIO's support for single-payer and the social insurance model. He talked of his support for single-payer in the early 1990's when he was UMWA President and a member of the AFL-CIO Executive Council and how important it was for the Labor Campaign to continue those efforts to move all of labor forward. He pointed to the shortcomings in the PPACA legislation and expressed regret that the AFL-CIO had not worked closer with Representative Kucinich on his legislative initiatives. He fielded several questions from participants about the need to strengthen Executive Council support for single-payer and encourage state federations to play a more active role.

The meeting adjourned at 5 PM and participants were bussed to the National Labor College for the remainder of the conference.

Saturday Roundtable Presentations

On Saturday, June 4, the meeting was called to order at 9 AM by Co-Chair Donna Dewitt at the Kirkland Center of the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland. Labor singer/songwriter/activist Anne Feeney performed an upbeat musical introduction.

The meeting addressed the need to situate our Campaign within the broader movement to defend and expand the social insurance model and to align ourselves with workers fighting to preserve their gains in both the public and private sectors. Gene Bruskin, Co-Convener of U.S. Labor Against War spoke about their New Priorities Network seeking to fund urgently needed jobs and restore vital public services by ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Donna Smith presented the National Nurses United's Main Street Contract Campaign that will link the fight for guaranteed healthcare with the call for jobs for all, secure retirement, quality public education, a safe and healthy environment, fair

taxation, adequate housing and protection from hunger and will target Wall Street as the source of the crisis that working people are in.

Stewart Acuff of the Utility Workers Union of America gave a presentation on the “fundamentals of organic movement building” and the importance of the fight for healthcare in the movement for economic justice. He said that, while the utilities industry has not been particularly affected by the economic crisis, the employers were using the crisis as an opportunity to intensify their attacks on workers. UWUA is calling for the public ownership of all electric, gas, water and sewer utilities. Acuff also conveyed greetings from UWUA President D. Michael Langford and UWUA support for the work of the Labor Campaign.

Shaun Flynn, Director of Governmental Affairs for the New York State Nurses Association gave a presentation on the situation in New York State. Late last year, the state completed a study showing that single-payer would be the most cost-effective and equitable method of healthcare delivery but the administration chose not to publicly release it or follow-up on its recommendations. Meanwhile, the Cuomo administration’s failure to support the renewal of the “millionaire’s tax” has exacerbated the state’s fiscal crisis and led to major bargaining fights by public workers to preserve jobs and benefits.

Don Trementozzi, President of CWA Local 1400 spoke about the upcoming Verizon negotiations and the long history of the fight of Verizon workers to preserve their employer-paid healthcare benefits. He connected this fight with that of the GE workers and many other workers in the private sector whose employers are making billions in profits yet want to jettison their healthcare obligations to their workers.

David Newby, President Emeritus of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO spoke about the development and prospects of the fight in Wisconsin to beat back the anti-labor attacks of the Walker administration. He identified several characteristics which moved that fight from the typical labor lobbying effort into something that mobilized the entire labor movement. He stressed that, while healthcare wasn’t part of the immediate demands, the healthcare crisis underlies all of the attacks on workers rights and urged the Labor Campaign to work with these emerging fights in ways that will build both movements.

Kurt Bateman, the Executive Director of the Ohio Single Payer Action Network talked about his work with the One-Payer Network which brings together activists who are fighting for state-based single-payer reforms. There are currently projects underway in 23 states. Many have significant labor support.

Participants then heard from a panel about recent victories in Vermont. Jonathan Kissam spoke about how the Vermont Workers Center always understood the fight to be about power, not public policy and about how framing the issue as a human rights issue helped build the coalition necessary to win. Mari Cordes of the Vermont Nurses discussed how the campaign affected her union and their role in mobilizing members in their communities. Jill Charbonneau spoke of the role of the State Fed in building alliances and advancing the legislative program.

Cindy Young of the California Nurses Association then gave a presentation on the campaign to pass and defend a single-payer bill in California. She outlined a multi-year, multi-million dollar project that would need to mobilize more than 20,000 activists at the precinct level. Only labor has the capacity to lead such an effort. Lenny Potash of Labor United for Universal Healthcare and Don Bechler of Single Payer Now responded to and amplified her presentation.

Plenary Action Items

The Conference went into plenary on Saturday afternoon until adjournment on Sunday morning (broken up by an excellent slide presentation on the causes, consequences and solutions of the healthcare crisis by Andy Coates that he has been presenting at union meetings around New York State). Mark Dudzic gave the National Coordinator's report summarizing the work of the Campaign since our last national meeting. The following Action Items were resolved:

- Participants heard about the recent right-wing smear campaign orchestrated by serial defamer Andrew Breitbart against Steering Committee Member Don Giljum and his colleague Judy Ancel. Breitbart spread falsehoods and doctored tapes about a labor studies course that Giljum and Ancel co-teach at the University of Missouri accusing them of promoting thuggery and violence. Until they were finally fully exonerated by the University, many of Giljum's and Ancel's colleagues and institutions ran for cover and did not distinguish themselves in their defense. The Meeting acknowledged the crucial support that Giljum and his Local 148 of the IUOE has given to the Labor Campaign and resolved that, "We stand in solidarity with our brother, Don Giljum, and are proud to have him serve with us on the Steering Committee of the Labor Campaign for Single Payer."
- The Meeting voted to add Andy Coates to the national Steering Committee as a new position representing the New York State Public Employees Association which has recently moved to endorse and financially support the Labor Campaign.
- Participants reviewed, discussed and debated the merits and shortcomings of national and state single-payer legislation. After much discussion, consensus was reached that we will continue to move forward based on the broad principle that we will support all legislative efforts that move us closer to single-payer including HR 676, S 915/HR 1200, serious state single-payer initiatives that have significant labor support, legislative and regulatory efforts to provide the necessary waivers to allow the implementation of state-level reforms while not undercutting the standards of healthcare delivery in other states, and viable "incremental" initiatives that move us closer to single payer such as lowering the eligibility age for Medicare.
- We resolved that the mission of the Labor Campaign must be pursued independent of the agendas of any elected official and that our job will not be

done until everyone in America has the right to access quality and affordable healthcare.

- We affirmed that, in order to win, our Campaign must find ways to link up with those who are in the fight to defend and expand the social insurance model. This includes fights by public workers to defend their bargaining rights and benefits whatever the political affiliation of the administrations they work under and the continuing battles that private sector workers must wage until we are able to remove healthcare from the bargaining table.
- We must address the issue of building diversity in our movement. This includes outreach to communities of color, building direct relationships with organizations such as APRI, CBTU, LACLA, AAPLA, CLUW and PAW at both the national and local levels and providing opportunities and forum for young labor leaders to emerge and find their voice.
- Labor needs to do more to build our movement. We will work to encourage our unions to commit real resources and mobilization to the fight for healthcare for all. We will work to move them beyond just passing resolutions. In doing so, we will stress our basic unity rather than pointing fingers at those who may have been right or wrong in the recent PPACA debates. Our theme is that “we cannot bargain our way out of this crisis.” We will work to establish a LCSP presence at national union conventions and in every state fed and central labor council. We will build on the positive recent actions of the AFL-CIO Executive Council and many other unions.
- We must adequately fund the Labor Campaign. Participating unions must renew their contributions and encourage others to contribute. Individual activists will be asked to financially support our efforts. We will ask the Labor Caucus for Single Payer to help reach out to other national unions. We will ask national unions that support the Labor Campaign to ask their local affiliates to also contribute.
- We will explore the possibility of mobilizing union pension and investment funds to support a divestment campaign against the private insurance industry.
- We will work to provide publicity, organizational and financial support for state campaigns and for workers’ fights where healthcare is a key issue.
- We will strengthen our efforts to be a clearinghouse for activists and organizations and work to ensure that the voices and concerns of grassroots activists and leaders are heard at the highest national policy and labor circles.