



America's Agenda COUNTDOWN

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Fall 2008

Congratulations Barack: This Summit's for You!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Journey to the Summit

by Doug Dority

Years ago there was a successful TV show called "The A Team" that featured a rag-tag group of ex-special forces types who each week administered rough justice to the bad guys. At the end of each episode, their leader would light up a cigar, take a big puff and exclaim: "It sure is satisfying when a great plan comes together."

Well, I'm not quite ready to light up a stogie, but we're getting there. Our "great plan" of achieving affordable health care for all by first developing strategies and providing the tools to win statewide reform campaigns, is coming together.

In our first newsletter, I made the point that state action was only a beginning. Our ultimate goal was to provide our leaders in the White House and Congress with a national solution.

“...our nation has never taken a major step forward on a great mission of change without forging a consensus about where we're headed.”

States have long prized their role as the "laboratories of democracy," local laws leading the way to federal legislation. Social Security evolved from a 1941 Missouri pension program for widows, and federal labor law was preceded by state legislation demanding recognition of basic labor rights. The federal S-CHIP program began as a Massachusetts plan to provide health insurance for children of low-income families. Several more states adopted it before Congress federalized the program in 1997.

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America's Agenda Summit Conversations: Finding Consensus for a 21st Century Health Care System

Go back to 1948 when President Harry Truman first proposed universal health care.

Then fast-forward to 1993 and the Clinton administration's highly ballyhooed attempt at reform.

In between those years, and to the present, the record is replete with failed efforts to replace our dysfunctional health care system with one that works.

But that was then, and this is now, when voter demand for "change" helped determine the outcome of a national election.

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"We must move to a 'health' system instead of a 'sick' system. Our system puts resources at the back end in reacting to disease rather than in the front end in promoting health... If the system cannot prevent preventable deaths—the system has failed."

JOE HANSEN
International President
United Food & Commercial Workers www.summitconversations.org



On "Brink of a Crisis," West Virginia Pursues State-of-the-Art Health Care System

America's Agenda and our West Virginia partners have launched a broad-based campaign to enact comprehensive statewide health care reform legislation. The West Virginians' Campaign for a Healthy Future brings together an unprecedented spectrum of more than 40 labor, business, religious and health care organizations at a critical time.

Health insurance premiums in the state have risen four times faster than earnings since 2000. West Virginia employers are caught in the same bind: their portion of annual premiums rose from \$5,195 to \$9,397 between 2000 and 2007.

Delegate Don Perdue and Sen. Roman Prezioso, chairmen of the House and Senate committees on health care, welcomed the Healthy Future Campaign. "We are on the

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A number of states have attempted to enact comprehensive health care reform legislation over the past three decades. From our founding day, *America's Agenda* studied the history of the efforts that preceded ours. We extracted the lessons we could from the experiences of others and applied them to building state health care reform campaigns that achieved unprecedented breadth of support from business, labor, churches and government leaders. We guided those campaigns to winning some of the most far-reaching health care reform legislation ever enacted in America.

Now, the time is right for the federal government to enact reform legislation that will guarantee every American affordable, high quality health care. It's a plain fact that our nation has never taken a major step forward on a great mission of change without forging a consensus about where we're headed. That's why *America's Agenda* announced at the Democratic National Convention in Denver that we were launching a new "Summit Conversations" series on American health care for the 21st century.

What *America's Agenda* has done is set the stage for America's leaders in business, labor, government and the health care sector to share their visions of the kind of health care system that will meet their own needs and those of 21st century Americans – and to do it with a degree of specificity that is unprecedented. If we've read our experience in hard-won state campaigns correctly, a consensus is already emerging and it needs to be articulated to propel and guide enactment of national health care reform.

As we direct our resources and energy toward winning federal health care reform legislation under the Obama administration, *America's Agenda* will not retreat from its work to win model health care reform legislation in the states. We'll pursue it with the same energy, creativity, and resolve that distinguished our winning campaigns during the toughest Bush years. There is no question that the states will need to become full partners with the federal government to actually implement health care reform that really works.

The election of 2008 signaled America's arrival to a time of fresh opportunity to win health care reform that has alluded federal advocates for 60 years. It's a time that calls for the visions, strategies, and special expertise of many national organizations that have earned our respect to be coordinated in new and effective ways. *America's Agenda* will continue to do everything we can, working shoulder to shoulder with our many diverse allies, to make sure that this time "a great plan comes together." ☺



Congressman Dick Gephardt (right of podium) stands with several members of the *America's Agenda* Board who honored him at the Democratic Convention. R to L are Iron Workers President Joseph Hunt (at the podium), *America's Agenda* President Doug Dority, UFCW International President Joseph Hansen, and ULLICO President Edward Smith.

Champion in the Fight: Democratic Convention Tribute to Dick Gephardt

At the Democratic National Convention in Denver more than 500 guests joined *America's Agenda* in paying tribute to the former US House Majority Leader Dick Gephardt for his lifelong leadership and dedication to health care reform.

"For more than 30 years Dick has been a champion in the fight to win affordable, high-quality health care for all Americans," said *America's Agenda* President Doug Dority. "His commitment to achieving the reform this country so desperately needs has been well-documented. I am particularly proud to honor him during the Democratic National Convention where he is surrounded by so many people who have followed his leadership on this issue."

Appropriately, *America's Agenda* used the occasion to launch the "Summit Conversations" series on American health care for the 21st century.

As an *America's Agenda* Board member, Dick Gephardt has been key in shaping the Summit Conversations. He is encouraged about the renewed prospects we now have for achieving public consensus on health care reform. "The state-by-state campaigns of *America's Agenda* have set the table for discussion and built the momentum for success," he says. "This time we're going to get it right." ☺

More *America's Agenda* directors speak at Dick Gephardt tribute. L to R in the photos below: A. Philip Randolph Foundation President Clayola Brown, Doug Dority, PhRMA Vice President Jan Faiks, and Congressman Gephardt



President-elect Barack Obama made health care reform a priority of his successful campaign. And as he prepares to enter the Oval Office, *America's Agenda* has a gift for him to help his new administration carry out that promise:

Just one week after he is sworn in as president, *America's Agenda* is launching a series of "Summit Conversations" on American health care for the 21st century among America's leaders in business, labor, government and the health care sector. High profile Summit Conversations will be held in 10 cities across the country.

Our country's ability to solve its health care crisis depends to no small extent on whether our political and private sector leaders can articulate a shared vision about the kind of health care system that will meet the needs of 21st century Americans. The absence of such a consensus in the past has hamstrung efforts to build political momentum behind any particular strategy for reform.

"There are mounting indications that the kind of consensus we need to pass health care reform is finally emerging," said *America's Agenda* President Doug Dority. "The Summit Conversations are going to explore the true range of convergence in our leaders' visions for America's health care future."

It is fitting that the first Summit Conversation will be held at the University of Miami where President Donna Shalala will be the host.

Dr. Shalala, a strong advocate of health care reform, has told activists that "without consensus, there can be no reform." Not only did she serve eight years as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, but last June she was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award.

Moderator for the Summits will be Bill Press, widely respected television and radio political commentator who has won three Emmys and one Golden Mike Award. He is host of the nationally syndicated "Bill

Press Show" on talk radio. For six years Press was co-host of CNN's "Crossfire" and he also co-anchored "The Spin Room" with Tucker Carlson and "Buchanan and Press" on MSNBC with Pat Buchanan. He has a reputation for illuminating the most complex political issues by drawing on his extensive experience.

"The elements of consensus revealed in the Summit Conversations have potential to be important guides and motivators for the Obama health care team and members of the new Congress who will shape the direction of American health care in this century," said *America's Agenda* Executive Director Mark Blum.

"If the consensus we've been working toward is truly emerging, as indicators suggest, the American people and our elected leaders need to know it," adds Dority. "We can't afford to miss another opportunity to enact the kind of national health care reform America needs." ☺



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brink of a crisis," said Prezioso. and state legislators value the Campaign's support in pulling West Virginia back from the edge.

State legislators hired health economist Dr. Ken Thorpe to work with them in devising a plan to make high quality health care affordable for every state resident, regardless of age, income or health status. Thorpe worked with *America's Agenda* and state legislators in Vermont to enact a landmark health care reform law that guarantees coverage to all uninsured residents while containing growth in health costs for every Vermonter.

"Our goal is pretty simple," said Thorpe. "We want to build the best state-of-the-art health care delivery system in the country in this state. We're seeking ways to improve the health of West Virginians and get the cost of health care down."

Kenny Perdue, president of the state AFL-CIO, is a founder and driving force in building a broad base of support for the campaign. "This is without historical precedent in the state of West Virginia," said Perdue. "We have started an initiative that many states wish they could get to, that our state is going to get to." ☺



State Senator Roman Prezioso addresses audience at the WV Campaign for a Healthy Future event. Beside him stand State Delegate Don Perdue (r) and WVEA Executive Director David Haney (l).

For more about the campaign, see: www.wvhealthyfuture.com

America's Agenda COUNTDOWN

America's Agenda HEALTH CARE for ALL

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Actresses Lauren Bacall, Phylicia Rashad Featured in America's Agenda Co-sponsored TV Ad

A television ad urging women to make health care the central issue in their choice of a presidential candidate appeared on nationwide cable television (CNN, MSNBC) in the days leading up to the November 4 election.



See the ad: www.americasagenda.org

Issue in determining their choice for the next president. Polling has consistently confirmed the importance of health care concerns to women and their responsiveness as voters to the issue of health care reform.

An Internet version of the ad has circulated widely. ☺

America's Agenda co-sponsored the ad with The Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease and a team of partners.

Celebrities featured in the ad included Lauren Bacall, Katey Segal, Phylicia Rashad and Mary Louise Parker.

Aimed at mobilizing female voters, the celebrities and other women appearing in the ad make a persuasive case that health care should be the key



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