



New Year
2007 Edition

America's Agenda

America's Agenda
HEALTH CARE
for ALL



COUNTDOWN

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Winter 2007

IL Governor Rod Blagojevich Commits to Universal Health Coverage as State Health Care Reform Effort Advances to a Critical New Stage

The clock is ticking on the timetable set for achieving universal coverage in Illinois' 2003 Health Care Justice Act (HCJA).

Over 2005 and 2006, the task force created by the HCJA held public hearings in all 19 of the state's congressional districts. On December 7, 2006, the Task Force voted to adopt a recommended plan for assuring that every Illinoisan has access to high quality, affordable health care coverage. Now the process moves to the final step defined by the HCJA: passage of legislation that will achieve universal health care in Illinois.

"Our task force has met the mandate of the Health Care Justice Act," says Jim Duffet, who was appointed to the task force by Governor Rod Blagojevich. "We've recommended a plan to resolve Illinois' health care crisis. Now, the legislature



Illinois family members join in the fight for universal health care.

is charged with enacting the legislation that is needed. The goal of our campaign is to help assure that it does," adds Duffet, who is also executive director of the Campaign for Affordable Health Care (CBHC).

...continues on p. 2

Governor Richardson and Health Advocates Share Commitment: "Health Care Coverage for All New Mexicans by 2008"

With 22% of the state population having no health insurance coverage, at all, New Mexico has the second highest percentage of uninsured residents in the nation. Only Texas has a higher proportion of uninsured.

For years, dedicated health care advocates have organized tirelessly. The Health Care for All Campaign has developed principles that should serve as standards for development of any state health care reform plan. The Health Security for New Mexicans Campaign has reintroduced an impressive universal coverage bill annually in the statehouse, but legislators have not reported the bill out of committee in recent years. No

alternative comprehensive reform bill has emerged, either.

The prospects for serious reform legislation may be changing, however.

Last spring, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson appointed the Health Coverage for New Mexicans Committee, a task force chaired by Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish. Pam Hyde, the state's Secretary of Human Services, said, "Governor Bill Richardson charged the Committee with finding a health care model that would get every New Mexico citizen the health care coverage they deserve."

At the State Democratic Party victory celebration in Albuquerque last November 7,

...continues on p. 2

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A Turning Point

by Doug Dority

The year 2006 was a watershed year in the struggle to win health care for all Americans.

Thanks especially to national media attention given to the reform legislation Massachusetts enacted last spring, an issue long considered a "third rail" of politics has become a "must" for presidential candidates of both parties.

Yet, Vermont's 2006 Health Care Affordability Act went further than any other state toward assuring that every resident has access to high quality, affordable health care coverage. The Vermont reform provides comprehensive coverage to all uninsured residents on an income-based sliding scale of premiums that is the lowest in the country. Vermont's reform legislation eliminates co-pays and deductibles for treatment of chronic illnesses, provides free vaccinations, and includes cost containment measures that will provide relief to all Vermonters.

Vermont voters have provided the most compelling evidence, yet, of the sea change that has occurred in the electorate's attitude toward universal health care reform and politicians who advocate it. In this issue, the article, "Vermont Voters Reward State Leaders Who Stood Up for Landmark Health Reform Legislation," reports how Vermont voters dispelled the conventional wisdom that health care reformers would be punished at the polls. America's Agenda and our Vermont partners built one of the most broad-based issue campaigns in the state's history – and the voter mobilization didn't stop when the legislation was passed. The outcome of Vermont's 2006 elections should stiffen the backs of even the most timid elected leaders.

America's dysfunctional health care system appears to be careening toward what author Malcolm

...continues on p. 2

A Turning Point

continued from cover

Gladwell called “the tipping point,” where a groundswell of motivating factors that have been building for years ignite a change that becomes almost unstoppable. Weary of waiting for Congress to act, scores of states and local governments are taking action on their own. Former Congressman and new **Oakland, California** Mayor Ron Dellums recently met with *America's Agenda* to discuss how municipalities can join the fight for universal health care and bring new ideas and energy to the movement.

Universal health care campaigns have emerged and are making progress in many states, and several of these have requested our help. You will read in this issue about developments in **New Mexico** in the aftermath of the Massachusetts and Vermont reforms. In **Illinois**, America's Agenda has worked for two years along side of our strategic partner, the Illinois Campaign for Better Health Care. At the end of 2006, the Illinois campaign has reached a transition point, as reported in “IL Governor Rod Blagojevich Commits to Universal Health Coverage as State Health Care Reform Effort Advances to a Critical New Stage.” In coming issues of *Countdown*, we will update you on the progress of reform campaigns in other states like **Rhode Island** and **West Virginia**, where America's Agenda is on the ground, already, helping grassroots organizations strengthen efforts to win real and sustainable universal coverage.

America's Agenda is working to increase our capacity to meet rapidly growing demand for our support. With the leadership of our expanded Governing and Advisory Boards, America's Agenda has founded a parallel new organization to promote universal health care public education, research, and leadership training: The America's Agenda Health Care Education Fund. We have retained Dr. Ken Thorpe, one of the most respected health care economists in the country, to provide high caliber analysis and development of universal health care reform policy in key campaign states. Over the past year, we have presented educational workshops and training sessions for various unions, the AFL-CIO Department of Professional Employees, business groups, university-sponsored conferences and health care professionals like the American Medical Women's Association and the American Medical Students Association. This training is part of our mission to build a network of activists that can lead the movement for universal health care into the next stage of our struggle.

America's Agenda is committed to a strategy of winning universal health care state-by-state, because we believe this is the fastest way to build momentum needed to win real national health care reform. There are encouraging signs that federal legislators have noticed the movement sweeping the states. Two bills introduced in the U.S. Senate would provide federal assistance to help states implement universal coverage reforms. Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin (a member of the America's Agenda Advisory Committee) has introduced similar legislation in the US House of Representatives. Just a few weeks ago, Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon introduced his own plan for universal health care coverage.

Our challenge, now, is to keep the momentum growing, state-by-state, across the country. If we meet this challenge by continuing to win state-by-state universal health care victories, history will show 2006 as a turning point in a struggle that began more than a half-century ago when President Harry S. Truman challenged the Congress to enact a guarantee that every American would have the security of comprehensive health care insurance.



Harry S. Truman

Illinois

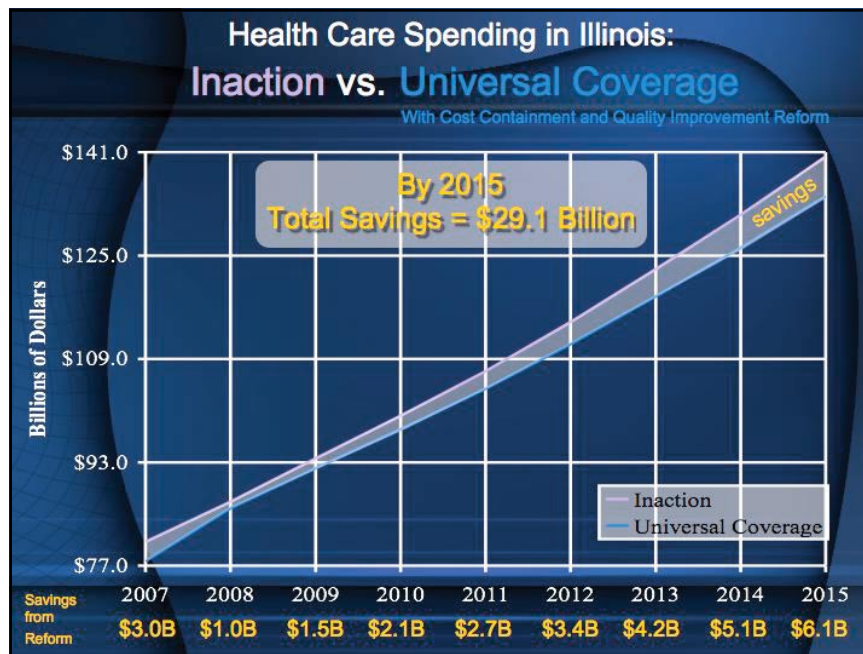
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House Speaker Michael Madigan indicates he will bring another perspective to the state debate over health care reform. The speaker asserts that any further expansion of state health care coverage will be dealt with “primarily as a budgetary matter.” An analysis by nationally respected economist Ken Thorpe indicates that comprehensive health care reform in Illinois will save the state nearly \$30 billion by 2015.

Governor Rod Blagojevich, who won re-election to a second term on November 7th, has expressed his support for passage of legislation that will guarantee access to affordable health coverage for every state resident. Governor Blagojevich's policy director Steve Frankl has reaffirmed that commitment. At a recent meeting of CBHC leaders in Chicago, Frankl said, “We are looking closely at the task force's recommendations. All options are on the table. The governor will propose a plan to secure health care coverage for all state residents.”

The new legislative session begins in January 2007. “We're facing a decisive phase of our struggle to win affordable health care for all Illinoisans,” says Duffet. “America's Agenda has been a very important strategic partner for our campaign. We'll be counting on your help, now, more than ever.”

Count on us, Jim. We'll be there. ☺



Data from Action Costs Less: Health Care Reform for Illinois, by Kenneth E. Thorpe, PhD.

New Mexico

continued from cover

Governor Richardson declared his goal of “Health Care for all New Mexicans by 2008!”

“A window of opportunity has opened in the state,” says New Mexico's CWA state worker president Robin Gould, an appointee to the Health Coverage for New Mexicans Committee. “The question is whether we can achieve meaningful health care reform for all New Mexicans before it slams shut, again.”

Across the country, the political terrain has shifted since passage of sweeping health care reform legislation by Vermont and Massachusetts in 2006. “Quite frankly, Governors across the country are jealous of the publicity Mitt Romney got out of the Massachusetts reforms,” says America's Agenda Executive Director Mark Blum. “Regardless of the merits of Massachusetts' reforms, Governor Romney put the term ‘universal health care’

America's Agenda Welcomes Dr. Ken Thorpe

America's Agenda is proud to welcome Ken Thorpe, PhD, one of the nation's leading health care economists and policy analysts, as a member of the America's Agenda team.

Dr. Thorpe's experience spans both government service and academic research. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health Policy in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 1993 to 1995. In this capacity, he coordinated all financial estimates and program impacts of President Clinton's health care reform proposals for the White House. He also directed the administration's estimation efforts in dealing with Congressional health care reform proposals during the 103rd and 104th sessions of Congress. Members on both sides of the aisle found Dr. Thorpe's economic estimates to be accurate and reliable.



Dr. Ken Thorpe

Dr. Thorpe has worked with various policymakers, including Senators Wellstone, Corzine, Bingaman, Snowe, Clinton, Obama and Kennedy to develop and evaluate alternative approaches for providing health insurance to the uninsured, and he has testified before several committees in the U.S. Senate and House on health care reform and insurance issues. He has consulted for various state governments and health care providers throughout the United States and abroad. He was the architect of the landmark Vermont universal health care reform legislation signed into law in May 2006.

“I am proud to be associated with America's Agenda,” comments Dr. Thorpe. “The organization is on the front line of some of the most important state efforts to achieve affordable, high quality health care for all.”

“Our continuing focus is on providing highly effective strategic communications and organizational support,” says America's Agenda Executive Director Mark Blum. “With Ken Thorpe on our team, we have added the capacity to bring world-class policy expertise to the support of state and local universal health care reform initiatives.” ☺

back into the mainstream political vocabulary and made it a requirement for presidential candidate resumes.”

Few New Mexican universal health care advocates expect that improvement of the political climate or changing fashions in political jargon, by themselves, will produce real health care reform in the state. The experience of other states has demonstrated amply that, without the support of a unified, broad-based citizens' campaign, the most promising opportunities for reform are likely to produce disappointing results.

“Expansion of Medicaid, which is one of the proposed models to be costed out and compared, is not real reform,” says Charlotte Roybal, another appointee to the Health Cov-

erage for New Mexicans Committee. “The real reform New Mexicans deserve must go further.”

“A window of opportunity has opened in the state,” says New Mexico's CWA state worker president Robin Gould... “The question is whether we can achieve meaningful health care reform for all New Mexicans before it slams shut, again.”

Roybal, who is also the Director of Health Action NM, the lead organization for the Health Care for All Campaign, points out, “Businesses and middle class families need relief from soaring health costs, too. With health insurance premiums rising five times



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faster than New Mexicans' wages, we need legislation that will get control of health costs and guarantee that every New Mexican has the security of affordable, high-quality health care coverage.”

The Governor's Committee has commissioned Mathematica, a Washington, DC-based consulting firm, to analyze and compare the cost of three plans, including Health Security for New Mexicans, for closing New Mexico's health coverage gap and comparing health care reform with the cost of doing nothing at all.

Meanwhile, health care reform advocates are focused on building the kind of broad-based, unified campaign that is needed to achieve real reform while New Mexico's window of opportunity remains open. ☺

Vermont Voters Reward State Leaders Who Stood Up for Landmark Health Reform Legislation

After the setbacks suffered by presidents Harry Truman through Bill Clinton following their foiled efforts to enact national health care legislation, the conventional wisdom has been that health care reform was an act of political suicide. The 2006 midterm election demonstrates that's not necessarily true, anymore.

In May 2006, Vermont legislators passed the most far-reaching health care reform legislation enacted by any state in the nation over the last three decades. Vermont's 2006 Health Care Affordability Act will provide access to affordable, comprehensive health care for every uninsured resident by the year 2010 and, it will reduce inflation in health insurance premiums for all Vermonters.

Initially, legislative leaders were concerned about "blowback" from their bold reform initiative, but they had the courage of their convictions, the backing of one of the broadest based issue campaigns in Vermont history, and knowledge of a 2005 AARP poll that revealed 75% of Vermonters were worried about having to pay more for their health care

in the future. Six out of 10 Vermonters said they would vote for a candidate who supported reform that provides health coverage for all.

They kept their word.

On November 7th, voters rewarded legislative Democrats who championed Vermont's health reform legislation by increasing representation in both houses to *super-majorities*. In all, Democrats picked up 10 seats in the House and 2 seats in the Senate. State Senate President Peter Welch, one of the principal advocates of the Vermont's historic health care reform, was elected to Vermont's sole seat in the U.S. Congress.

As everywhere, the Iraq war was a major concern when voters walked into their polling booths. Yet, exit pools confirmed that health care reform was on Vermonters' minds, as well.

Vermont voters have proven an important point for elected leaders everywhere: Health care has become a winning issue. Voters want real health care reform, and they will reward elected leaders who make it happen.

Where do you go for breaking news from the front line battles for universal health care?

To the America's Agenda website, of course.

www.americasagenda.org



Check out the website!

