



SOLIDARITY

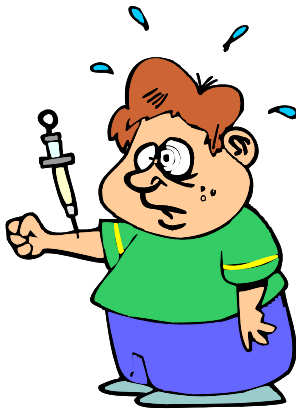
In The Sunshine

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLORIDA AFL-CIO

June, 2009

VOL. X ISSUE 3

This Summer In Florida...It's All About Health Care



It has been decades in the works, but finally health care reform is on the table. After years as a political issue, often talked about on the campaign trail but rarely if ever acted on, President Obama has thrown down the gauntlet and demanded that major health care reform legislation hit his desk this summer. This is a HUGE development and could represent a defining moment in the history of the United States of America. While this moment is rich in opportunity, there are no assurances whatsoever that Congress, specifically the United States Senate, will seize the opportunity. Health care represents one-sixth of the entire U.S. economy, which is an incredible amount of money. It is bound up in the profit interests of some of the biggest, most powerful special interests in the world. Insurers, drug companies and other private interests reap obscene profits from what has ceased to be a health care system and become instead a massive disease industry, one that puts profits over people. Our economy, our very social order itself, will not survive if we do not force serious reforms that dismantle the disease industry and replace it with a real, comprehensive system of health care that holds to one key principle...if you are human...quality health care will be available. We often relax, comfortable that we have built the greatest nation on earth. We are nothing however, if are people are left sick and dying because they can't get the health care they need and deserve.

The powerful groups who control this disease industry will not simply give up their unprecedented profits and power without a fight and Florida has become ground zero in this historic, critical battle. Those who profit from the current system will work to make the debate over health care reform one of the most complicated we have ever seen. In order to cut through the intricacies of this important debate, the national AFL-CIO has identified several key principles that must be honored in any health care reform legislation. These principles will serve as our anchors as we move forward with this all important campaign.

The "public option" must be part of health care reform legislation. A public health insurance plan makes reform work. It will bring down costs and guarantee quality affordable health care for all. Giving everyone the choice of a strong public health insurance plan will inject needed competition into the market and drive lower costs and improved quality across all plans. It will also mean that health care will be there for all of us, no matter what.

Employers must pay their fair share. Health reform must build on what works, which for 160 million Americans is the employer-based system. To do that, employers must be required to either offer coverage to their workers or pay into a fund to finance coverage for uninsured workers. The principle "Play or Pay" at fair and reasonable levels will level the playing field so free rider firms can't continue to shift costs to the employers that offer good benefits. It will also hold down federal costs by preventing employers from dumping their workers into the new subsidized plans.

Health reform must ensure affordable coverage for pre-Medicare retirees. Employers that offer coverage to their pre-65 retirees incur enormous expense, but without that coverage, retirees have no affordable options for finding coverage on their own. Health care reform must bring down costs for retirees.

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Not surprisingly, the powerful for-profit interest groups who are working to run the table on this debate are working against many of these key principles.

PUBLIC OPTION – The public option is the key to any health care reform. It will inject much needed competition into the insurance market and is the only option currently under consideration in the Senate that will provide true universal coverage. This is the lynchpin of all of the health care reform measures. Without it, meaningful reform can't be achieved. Key Senators, like the bulk of the Republican caucus and Democrats like Mary Landrieu (LA) and Ben Nelson (NE), have already come out against the offering of a public plan option in any way, shape or form. Others are pushing some "compromises" that are completely unacceptable and most are designed to keep any public plan from cutting into the market share of the giant health insurers. Some would place so many exclusions in the system so that anyone looking to exercise the public option would still be forced to purchase private policies to get even some of the most basic health care services. One plan on the table would create a "trigger" would ensure that the public option is only put into play if things get really really bad. Until that time the status-quo will remain in effect. Guess what? Things are already really really bad. To make matters worse, the language being discussed makes it almost impossible to pull this "trigger" so the public option will exist in name only.

PLAY OR PAY – Employer provided health insurance is working for over 160 million American workers and their families. If employers refuse to provide coverage, they must pay into the system to offset the costs borne by the taxpayers when their workers are forced into the emergency rooms and other areas of the expensive last resort system. Pay or play holds down federal costs by keeping employers from dumping low-wage workers into new subsidized plans and generates revenue to help fund subsidies for low-income individuals and the uninsured. It will actually lower costs for business. The vast majority of firms that don't offer health insurance are small and mostly low-wage. Health reform will give small firms more affordable options for providing their workers with health benefits, probably in combination with additional subsidies for those with low-wage workers. The only firms that will wind up paying more are the Wal-Marts of the world who routinely deny affordable options and force their workers into programs like Medicaid for the taxpayers to subsidize.

TAXING BENEFITS – Some in the United States Senate are talking about taxing workers with employer sponsored health care in order to pay for some components of health care reform. This is moving in the exact opposite direction of health care reform. Taxing health care benefits will do nothing but raise costs on America's workers...the same people currently struggling in the current economy! This was John McCain's idea of health care reform, one that was soundly rejected by the voters on Election Day.

Senator Bill Nelson has not clarified his position on these and other issues, so over the next several weeks we will be calling on Florida's labor movement to hit the streets to ensure that Senator Nelson and the rest of Florida's congressional delegation do the right thing and get behind these key principles of health care reform. This is a major campaign...one our children and grandchildren can't afford for us to lose. Keep an eye out for actions in your area in the upcoming weeks and do everything you can to help us turn around America and build a brighter and healthier future for our country.

The 14th Annual Florida Labor-Management Conference



This year's Labor-Management Conference will be held August 2nd – August 5th at the Island Grand Tradewinds Resort in beautiful St. Pete Beach. The FLMC is committed to our "Progress through Partnership" motto. The conference stresses communication, leadership, education, and relationship building between Labor and Management groups. The FLMC has become a major event for the State of Florida's labor-management community. Attendees at the 2009 conference will have the opportunity to listen to nationally recognized experts in the field of labor-management relations, participate in workshops regarding arbitration, negotiation, case law studies, bargaining, and benefits. The conference provides an excellent opportunity to network with peers from across the southeast, learn from others' experiences, develop new skills, discover new work strategies, and more. As always, the FLMC recreation and entertainment committee will have plenty of social activities scheduled for the 2009 conference participants, including the annual golf tournament, bowling bash and Casino Night. Registration is going on now. For more information, visit the conference website at <http://flmc.ksc.nasa.gov> or contact our offices at (850) 224-6926.

What about Single-Payer?

At the 2007 Biennial Convention the Florida AFL-CIO joined 38 other state federations across the nation and officially re-affirmed its endorsement of HR 676, the United States National Health Insurance Act. This legislation, sponsored by Congressman John Conyers and co-sponsored by 78 other members of the U.S. House, would reform the current Medicare system and expand the coverage so that all Americans are eligible. Senator Bernie Sanders has filed similar legislation in the Senate (SB 703). This legislation creates a "single payer" health care system that many health care policy experts and economists agree is the simplest, most cost effective way to realize our goal of universal health care. Simply stated, it would reform and expand the current Medicare system, a single-payer system that is considered one of the most successful and efficient social service programs in the history of the nation, to all Americans. Quite simply, you keep your doctors and other health care professionals but the federal government will be the insurance provider, spreading the risk to millions of people. This would drastically reduce costs, like the billions that are currently going to insurance CEO's and other overhead, and quickly get us to the point of universal health care for the United States. Unfortunately, the disease industry lobby has used its incredible power to keep this common sense option off the table, even though most polling indicates that this is the solution most voters prefer. Consequently, even though well over 500 union organizations in 49 states, including 128 Central Labor Councils and 39 state federations, have endorsed HR 676, the national AFL-CIO has not included this option as part of the health care reform they have endorsed, simply because it is not one of the options being considered in Congress. There is some hope, as the House has called for detailed hearings on the single-payer option, although the Senate has refused. While the campaign here in Florida will focus on the four principles outlined earlier (since these are the issues currently on the table) it is important not to forget the single payer option that we have endorsed. Here is a list of online resources to find out more about the single payer health care solution and more importantly, how you can get involved in forcing our elected leaders to make this option part of this critical debate.

Labor for Single Payer Healthcare - <http://www.laborforsinglepayer.org>

Healthcare Now - <http://www.healthcare-now.org>

California Nurses Association, AFL-CIO - <http://calnurses.org>

Physicians for a National Health Program - <http://www.pnhp.org>

Unemployment Help is on the Way

The unemployment situation in America is growing worse. The national unemployment rate now stands at 8.9% and when workers who have been dropped from the rolls or are underemployed are factored in that number is a staggering 15.6%. In Florida, the unemployment rate has hit a near record setting 9.6%. Hard-working families are struggling to get by, and too often, they don't know where to turn for help. That's where the Unemployment LifeLine comes in. A joint project of the AFL-CIO and our community affiliate Working America, the Lifeline is a one-stop guide that links workers to the resources in their area, from unemployment offices to veterans' services to child care. It also offers the opportunity to talk to others and share support and lessons learned. This represents a vital service we can provide to all of Florida's workers, union and non-union alike. We need everyone to help us promote this amazing tool. Several resources have been developed to help.

[Unemployment Lifeline – http://www.unemploymentlifeline.com](http://www.unemploymentlifeline.com)

Resources for Promotion:

Working Families Toolkit – <http://www.workingfamielstoolkit.com>

Copies of unemployed workers materials can also be ordered from

Working America

815 16th Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20006

TEL: 202-637-3937 FAX: 202-508-6900

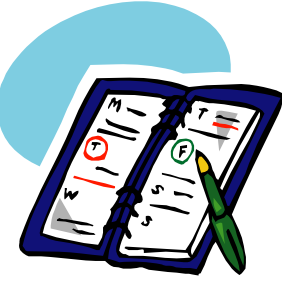
E-mail Address: unemploymentlifeline@workingamerica.org

Save the Date!

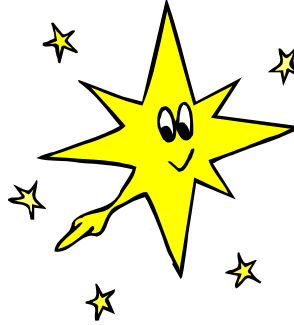
**The Florida AFL-CIO 2009
Biennial Convention**

**October 4 – 8, 2009
The Shores Resort & Spa -
Daytona Beach Shores**

Officer elections, the Labor Hall of Fame Gala and one of the nicest beach resorts in Florida! The official call and credentials will be in the mail by July 5th. You can keep up with all the developments by visiting us on the web at www.flafcio.org. For vendor information or other early questions contact Hazel at (850) 224-6926 or hziegler@flafcio.org.



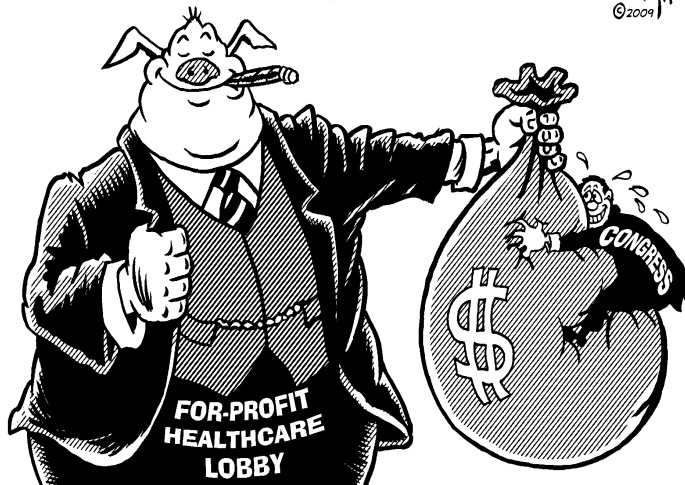
Reminder



Now that the 2009 Legislative Session has concluded, we have returned to our Solidarity in the Sunshine monthly newsletter. The Final Report of the 2009 Session, including information on votes cast and rankings of both the best and worst legislators on working family issues

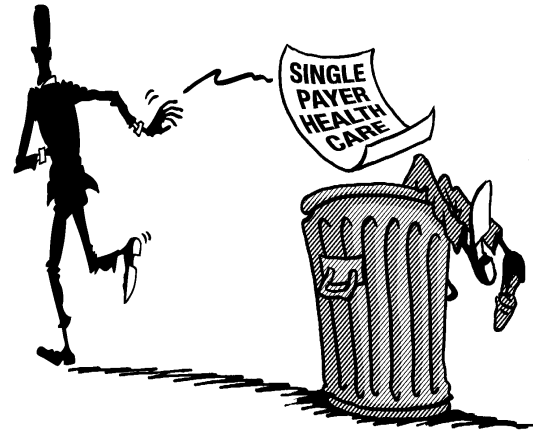
this session, will be mailed later this month. If you have material for the newsletter or ideas for articles, please contact Rich Templin, our Communications Director, at (850) 224-6926 or by email at rtemplin@flafcio.org.

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THE "YES WE" CAN



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