

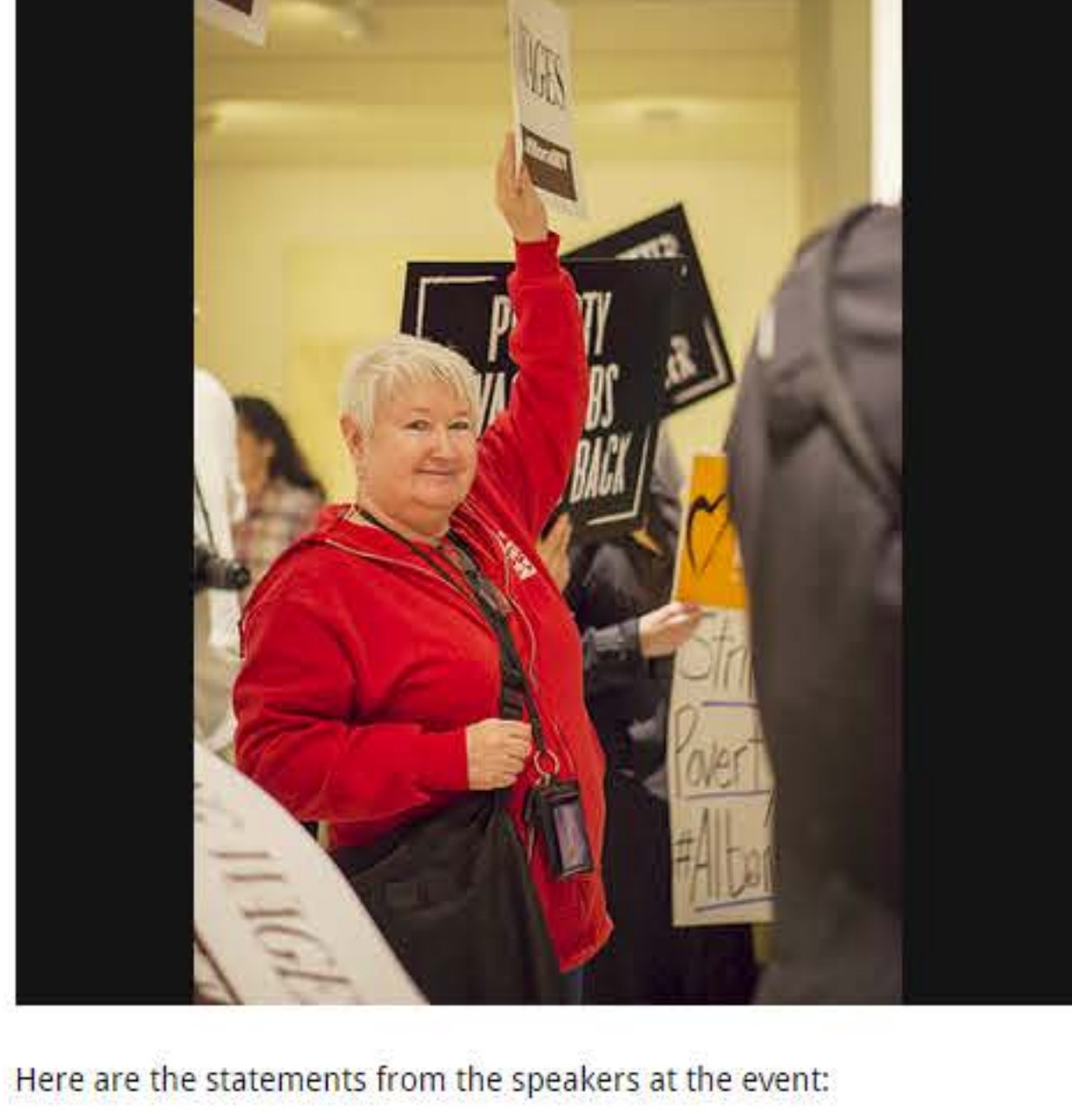


On the evening of Thursday, August 20th, over 70 interested community members gathered at the Ryan-Chelsea Community Health Center to discuss and learn about the current health care reform proposals in Congress at a teach-in sponsored by Health Care for America Now and it's New York City coalition.



Next week we'll be posting the slide show presentations used at this event, and similar events across the state. Also, check back here on Thursday evening to watch a live stream of the event in Buffalo.

Here are some photos of the event:



Here are the statements from the speakers at the event:

Kate Doehring, Citizen Action of New York:

Hello everyone, and welcome and thank you for coming today. My name is Kate Doehring and I am an organizer with Citizen Action here in New York City.

I would like to first of all thank the Ryan-Chelsea Community Health Center for hosting us today, as well as Loraine Leong with the Ryan Center Network, and Darrel Ng and Elizabeth Swain with the Community Health Care Association of New York State who helped with the arrangements.

We also want to thank Representative Nadler for being here with us today.

We are here today standing as the New York City Organizing Committee for Health Care for America Now. We are: ACORN, AFSCME NYS, the Children's Defense Fund of NY, Citizen Action of NY, the Committee of Interns and Residents, the Communication Workers of America, the Community Service Society, Make the Road NY, Metro NY Health Care for All Campaign, MoveOn, the National Physicians Alliance, the NY Immigration Coalition, NYC for Change, NYS AFL CIO, Raising Women's Voices, SEIU Local 32 BJ, and 1199 United Healthcare Workers East.

We are all here today because we want to see health care reform happen, and we want to see it happen now. And we are here because we support a strong public option and we are calling on our Congressional leaders and our President to stand strong – "we're with you!"

This is one of several press events around the state happening in the next few days- we are excited to send off our Congressional leaders to go back and get the job done.

Before I introduce our first speaker, I want to thank all of you standing here today. Originally we planned to have only a couple of dozen people, now we have over 150. At a teach-in last night we expected 40 grassroots leaders, there were over 70. And next weekend at a Unity March to Times Square we hope to have hundreds if not thousands of New Yorkers walking and standing in support of true health care reform. The public is speaking out and saying – We want Health Care Reform Now!

Our first speaker is Kathy Gruber, Executive Director of the Ryan-Nena Community Health Care Center who will also welcome us here today.

Jean Andre-Sassine, Chair, St. Alban's ACORN:

My name is Jean Andre-Sassine. I live in Queens Village, Queens and am the chair of St. Alban's ACORN.

In 2008 I was laid off from my job doing location work in the film industry. When I lost my job, I lost my health insurance for my family. I have two children and a wife who was already scheduled for surgery when I lost my job. My wife needed to this surgery, but I was going to be left with no insurance.

My insurance premium was \$900 a month. There was no way I could afford to pay health insurance and pay all the other bills I had. So, I stopped paying my mortgage so that I could pay the health insurance for my family.

Families should never have to make this choice, whether they are going to have to pay for healthcare or pay for a roof over their head.

There needs to be an option out there that will be affordable for families like mine. We cannot afford to pay \$1000 a month for healthcare. We also cannot afford to not have healthcare.

This is why there needs to be a strong public option. I personally have seen that private insurance companies do not have plans that are affordable to families. This is why we need a public option that will provide an affordable option for us.

Dr. Manisha Sharma, M.D.:

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Dr. Manisha Sharma. I am a member of the National Physicians Alliance. I stand before you today to tell you my patient story. This story isn't about one of my patients, this story is about me.

When I was in my early 20's, I was attending a fine arts school to pursue my dream of becoming a dancer and a musician- and if I may add, I had some talent. That dream, came to a halt. I was hit by a car while walking in a crosswalk. For the next 7 years, I underwent four major hip surgeries and extensive physical therapy.

I, like many other patients I met along the way, had to learn a few hard lessons. One was that my physical problems paled in comparison to the stress of dealing with my private health insurance company. Did you know, if a third-party is involved in your medical issue- like the woman driving the car that hit me- then your health insurance company has a right not to pay your medical bills? And this is even while you're paying your insurance premiums? So there I was, a previously healthy 20-something year old, being threatened by my health insurance company that they may not pay for the medical bills while I'm paying my insurance premium, and continuing to need medical care to walk normally. And now, for the rest of my life, I have a pre-existing condition, through no fault of my own.

But I also have a lot to thank the private insurance industry for. For example, I got to meet many hardworking, Americans who had similar struggles with paying their bills and getting the medical care they needed. Their brave experiences, combined with my own, inspired me to become a patient rights advocate. And since a patient's best advocate is his or her doctor, I decided to pursue a career in medicine.

I am now proud to say, I recently graduated from medical school. But, I am also one of those people who are in between jobs- for me, that's in between graduation and residency- and I have no healthcare. This is just one of the many gaps in the existing system where if you're not on someone else's plan like a parent or a partner, then you have a choice to purchase a private health insurance plan, and it is only a choice if you can afford it.

I cannot afford private health insurance. I mean, I love New York, but you got to make ends meet. On top of that, I have a pre-existing condition, which makes getting coverage almost impossible. So here I am, a hard working American who overcame a personal challenge, became a doctor, and now has fallen into a gap in our broken health care system. I am part of that statistic of 50 million people who are working or searching for work, who do not have health insurance.

I am here to tell you as a doctor and as a patient, that a public health insurance option MUST be a part of healthcare reform. For those of you out there who don't think it is essential and imperative, consider some of these questions: what would you do if you lost your job tomorrow? How would you provide affordable healthcare coverage for your family, yourself? Like you, I think about this everyday. Everyday I walk down the street, and I think to myself: what would I do if I got hit by another car? How would I be able to pay for an emergency room visit, let alone just trying to pay for my groceries or my rent? Please, make no mistake about it, I am one of the "lucky uninsured", as I am fortunate to be part of a community of physicians that would certainly help me if I was to get sick tomorrow.

As I mentioned before, a patient's best advocate for healthcare is a patient's doctor. Today, I am not only advocating for myself, I am advocating for my patients. The public health insurance option, is just that: AN OPTION. We need a system that puts patients before profits, and does not make money off of your illness. The option of a public health insurance will keep the private companies "in-check". It will keep them honest. What is wrong with having a system, where if you love your insurance, you can keep it OR you can have a choice of having an affordable public insurance option that will always be there for you, regardless if you are in-between jobs, or have a pre-existing condition, like me. No questions asked.

I went into medicine because I believe that healthcare is a right, not a privilege. We cannot afford to lose this battle. We are the ones who can make this happen. So please, get involved. Talk to your friends and family. Call your member of Congress. Join us. But whatever you do, DO SOMETHING. Now is the time.

Becca Telzak, Coordinator, Small Business United for Health Care, Make the Road NY:

Small Business United for Health Care, is a coalition of over 600 small business owners from the New York City area that have come together to push for health care reform that is of high quality, comprehensive, affordable and inclusive of immigrants. We are a project of Make the Road NY, a community-based, organization in 16 states working with small business owners to advance health care that works for small businesses, employees and the economy.

Small businesses are the heart of New York's economy and the heart of communities across our state. However, they are the hardest hit by the health insurance crisis. Without the bargaining power of a large group, small businesses pay more for health care and get less in return- They now pay on average more than 10% of payroll for health coverage. As a result, they frequently go without coverage for their employees (and owners, too) or receive less coverage in the plans they are able to buy, placing their health and financial security at risk. They are also then being forced to lay off employees or shut their doors for good because of the rising costs of health care.

Freddy Castiblanco, owner of a business in Jackson Heights called Terraza 7 train café started his business in an abandoned storefront, and has built La Terraza into a vibrant business with 11 employees. However affordable health coverage remains out of reach for him. He states, "As my business grew, I wanted to find health coverage for my employees and their families. My hope was crushed when I consulted a broker and found the premium for a decent benefits package would be over \$700 a month... for each employee. This would make health care the largest expense for my business after wages – over eighteen percent of my payroll – outweighing rent and any other operating expense."

Small business owners are willing to contribute for quality health coverage for their employees, but can't do this without a system of shared responsibility where the costs are shared by all stakeholders. Therefore, small business owners support an approach to reform that includes the choice of a public health insurance option which will give them real choices and bargaining power. encourage competition between private insurers and the new public plan, and help reduce costs. It will also guarantee that high quality, affordable coverage will be available to small businesses and self employed people no matter what happens.

In a survey we conducted of over 200 small business owners from across NY, when asked about their attitudes toward public oversight and private insurers, 80% of respondents said they preferred increased public oversight, and when asked about the public plan option 73% choose the public plan option that guarantees affordable health insurance to everyone with a public alternative to private coverage.

As seen in a recent Commonwealth Fund report, the public option will benefit the bottom lines of employers and the nation by saving \$3 trillion on national health expenditures and \$231 billion for private employers from 2010-2020. Also, it will offer immediate health insurance savings to small businesses where the premiums for a new public plan are projected to be 20-30 % lower than in the private individual/ small group market.

Small business owners need real choices in health care, and support reform that expands choice by including a public health insurance option. As Castiblanco states "give us more choices, including a public health insurance option to ignite competition, drive down costs and make good coverage affordable, and you will find small business owners on main streets across America not only willing to contribute, but ready to serve."

Paul Meissner, MSPH, President, Public Health Association of NYC:

The Public Health Association of NYC and the American Public Health Association have mobilized our members to urge enactment of strong health reform legislation this year. Health reform represents a critical opportunity to improve the public's health and start moving our nation from a system that focuses on treating the sick to one that keeps people healthy.

Yes, we do need to make sure people can get the care they need when they are sick without bankrupting their families or spending countless hours arguing with insurance companies over unfair policies. But we also need to make prevention a stronger part of routine health care in this country.

When everyone has a family doctor and regular checkups, we can begin to reduce the incidence of obesity and diabetes and detect the development of cancer and cardiovascular disease before it is too late for the patient. We can start to address the health disparities that have consigned many low-income Americans and people of color to second-class health care systems.

A public plan option is an important element in fulfilling the tremendous promise of health reform. Why? There are two important reasons.

First, a public plan can demonstrate how to shift the emphasis of health systems from acute medical care toward prevention and wellness. Because it will be a public plan, it can incorporate key public health priorities, such as promoting exercise, sound nutrition and the regular vaccinations and health screenings that can prevent disease.

Second, because the public plan will not be focused on making a profit, it can serve as a model for affordability for other plans within the existing health system. We must structure the public plan option so it can benefit from the same low administrative costs we have seen in the Medicare system, which are in sharp contrast to the high administrative costs that have, until now, consumed too many premium dollars in the private sector.

The NYS Constitution explicitly provides for the social welfare of its inhabitants. These include public relief and care and public health. What more important initiative can the President and Congress make in these times than to provide a strong plan for health reform that includes a public health insurance option.

I am pleased to stand here today with Representative Nadler and my other colleagues to urge Congress to return to Washington after Labor Day and enact a historic health reform plan that will bring the potential of improved public health to every community in our nation.

Mark Hannay, Director, Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign:

Thank you all for joining us here today. And we want to thank Rep. Nadler for being a true champion for health care justice in Congress.

My name is Mark Hannay, and I am Director of the Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign, a citywide coalition of community groups and labor unions founded in 1993 to fight for fundamental health care reforms leading to a universal health care program here in New York and in America. We are partnering with Citizen Action of New York to help lead Health Care for America Now's New York City Organizing Committee.

If you listen to the media this week, you'd think that the public option is already dead and off the table. All of us stand here to say nothing could be further from the truth.

A solid core of Representatives and Senators are fighting back, stating that they will not vote for any bill that does not include a strong public option. We New Yorkers stand in solidarity with them, and stand behind them – in short, "we got your back!" A robust public option will not be off the table unless we fail to take action. This fight is far from over, and there will be many twists and turns as the legislative process moves forward over the coming weeks.

The public option makes reform work. It is at the core of health care reform. A strong public option is one of the essential "game changers" that makes health care reform real and not illusory. As all the forces in America who strongly believe in a strong public option stand up for it together, we are formidable and Yes We Can win the fight for REAL, comprehensive health care reform. The battle for real reform and the public option has now only just begun.

Nothing about the political theatre of recent Town Hall meetings has worked for the opponents of true democracy and health reform. The "huff & puff" crowd huffed, and they puffed, but nothing happened, and we're still standing. We have not been intimidated. A large majority of the public continues to support a choice of a public health insurance plan as a means to rein in the abuses of the insurance companies. The health care movement is growing stronger, broader, and deeper as more and more individuals, community organizations, and trade unions are mobilizing to speak out to demand a strong public option. The recent assaults were loud and nasty, but our opponents can't win because we all continue to stand together, community and labor, with President and Obama and the majority in Congress.

It's been a tumultuous few weeks, but starting right now we – community and labor advocates for health care for all – are redefining the national debate. The next month as Congress returns to work is our opportunity to tell in and really be part of what will someday be viewed as a pivotal moment in our nation's history. Someday we will tell our kids and grandkids how we stood up for what was right in the face of fierce opposition, and helped change the direction and character of our country.

New Yorkers voted for change last fall. To continue last fall's campaign slogan, "si se puede, and yes we can!"

0 Comments Citizen Action of New York Login

Recommend Share Sort by Newest

Start the discussion... Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON CITIZEN ACTION OF NEW YORK WHAT'S THIS?

Workers, Advocates Call on Cuomo's Wage Board to Eliminate Sub-Minimum Wage for ... NY Education Commissioner John King heading to Washington

Report Says New York Officials Manipulated Federal Water Study NYC: Collaborating to Win / Fair Elections Teach-In

Subscribe Add Disqus to your site Privacy DISQUS