



WVAHC *Reform News*

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care

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Issue 1

May 3rd Rally at the Capitol

Within Our Reach: Health Care for All

Each week 4 West Virginians die because they lack health insurance according to a recent Families USA report. (They are a national consumer health care reform organization. See story on page 3) As many as 22,000 Americans die each year because they lack health insurance. In terms of loss of life, this is the equivalent to a 9/11 disaster happening every two months.

Doing nothing is no longer an option. We need health care reform sooner rather than later.

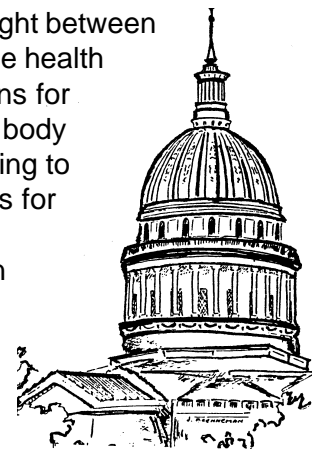
In order to send a clear, unmistakable message to decision makers about the need for health care reform, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care is joining with labor, education, businesses, churches and other groups to rally for health care reform in Charleston on Saturday, May 3rd from 10 am to 1 pm.

WVAHC needs your active participation in planning and participating in this rally.

Here are the details: On Saturday, May 3rd, please park in the state employees' parking lot at the Capitol (near the War Memorial) before 10 am. A motor coach will take you down to West Virginia Health Right, a free clinic for the uninsured, at 1524 Washington Street, East. We will then march down Washington Street to the Capitol, and hold a rally. The rally will begin at noon and will end by 1 pm. There will be an uninsured person providing insights on how difficult it is to be uninsured. Don Perdue, Chairman of the House Health Committee, Kenny Perdue, President of the AFL-CIO, Steve Roberts, President of the state Chamber of Commerce, Charlie Delauder, President of WVEA, Betty Ireland, Secretary of State, Rev. James Patterson, President of the Partnership of African American Churches and Pam Neal, President of the West Virginia Nurses

Association, have all agreed to speak.

If you can be at Health Right between 8 and 10 am, there will be free health screens. There will be screens for blood pressure, blood sugar, body mass index and we are working to see if we can include screens for cholesterol and triglycerides. There will also be information on how to enroll in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Access West Virginia, which is a state program for people that are at high risk.



If you can help organize your neighborhood or work place, please contact Perry Bryant at pbryant@wvahc.org or 344-1673 for flyers and other materials that you can use to promote the rally. A flyer for the rally is also posted on our web site at www.wvahc.org.

The list of sponsors is impressive, and include: Communications Workers of America, Healthy Kids and Families Coalition, National Association of Social Workers West Virginia Chapter, Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield, Partnership of African American Churches, United Mine Workers of America, United Steelworkers District 8, Wheeling - Charleston Catholic Diocese, West Virginia AFL-CIO, West Virginia Black Medical Society, West Virginia Chamber of Commerce, West Virginia Citizen Action Group, West Virginia Council of Churches, West Virginia Education Association, West Virginia Health Right, West Virginia Hospital Association, West Virginia Nurses Association, West Virginia Primary Care Association, and West Virginians for Affordable Health Care.

An Organized Voice of Consumers in Health Care Reform.

Legislature Ends a Lackluster Session

Very little substantive legislation on health care was adopted by the legislature this session. The four most important bills were:

- Senate Bill 13. Under SB 13 the Board of Dental Examiners will develop regulations allowing dental hygienists to practice under the “general supervision” of a dentist rather than the “direct supervision” of a dentist. This will allow dental hygienists to clean teeth, etc. in schools, community health centers, nursing homes, etc. without having a dentist physically present at the school or community health center. Both dental hygienists and WVAHC would have preferred that SB 13 spell out what functions dental hygienists could perform under general supervision. This approach would provide more certainty to the dental hygienists and would avoid the lengthy rule making process which will delay for months the ability of dental hygienists to practice without a dentist being present.

- House Bill 4418. HB 4418 requires hospitals to report rates of infection that hospitals cause to the Health Care Authority. A number of states have required hospitals to report their infection rates, and these reports have led to quality improvement

efforts and in some cases dramatic reductions in rates of infections. It is great to see West Virginia added to the list of states that report hospital infection rates. It is a tribute to the West Virginia Hospital Association who promoted HB 4418 and agreed that hospitals should report infection rates.

- House Bill 3056. Under HB 3056 the Board of Pharmacy will develop rules allowing pharmacists to give flu and pneumonia shots. 49 other states already allow pharmacists to give immunizations after they have been trained. Under HB 3056, pharmacists will not be able to give hepatitis A or B, herpes or tetanus shots unless a rule is jointly issued by the Board of Pharmacy, the Board of Medicine and the Board of Osteopathy.

While this is a modest approach, at least we will no longer be the only state in the country that prohibits its pharmacists from giving immunizations.

- Senate Bill 722. SB 722 allows the Board of Pharmacy to regulate the dispensing of prescription drugs at the ten free clinics around the state. These free clinics are an invaluable asset for uninsured West Virginians. Along with community health centers, the free clinics are the source of primary (and some specialist) care for the uninsured. Most of the free clinics are financially fragile relying on volunteer physicians and donated prescription drugs from drug manufacturers. The Board of Pharmacy has stated that they carefully balance the need to protect patient safety with the fragile financial situation of the free clinics. WVAHC will closely monitor the development of these regulations to ensure that the Board of Pharmacy honors this commitment.

What didn't pass is actually a more impressive list.

- Allowing citizens notice and right to comment on proposed changes in Medicaid. West Virginia is the only state in the country that does not provide its citizens the right to comment on changes in the Medicaid program. A bill to open up this process passed the House of Delegates both in 2007 and 2008, and an Interim Committee studied the issue and also recommended opening up the process. Unfortunately, the bill died in the Senate Health Committee.



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for
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Families USA Report Estimates That 4 West Virginians Die Each Week Because They Lack Health Insurance

WVAHC combined with West Virginia Health Right to release the Families USA report, *Dying for Coverage in West Virginia*. This report analyzed data from two previous reports to provide state level data for the first time ever on the number of uninsured who die because they lack insurance.

In 2002 the prestigious Institute of Medicine estimated that 18,000 Americans die prematurely because they did not have health insurance. Earlier this year the Urban Institute updated this report and estimated that 22,000 uninsured Americans die prematurely.

Using these two reports, Families USA's analysis found that:

- 4 West Virginians die each week due to the lack of health insurance, or 210 people each year.
- Between 2000 and 2006, an estimated 1,500

Lackluster Session

(continued from page 2)

•Banning soft drinks in schools. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued a report last spring calling for a ban on trans fats and limits on total calories, saturated fats, sugar and sodium for snacks sold in schools. The State Board of Education adopted these standards just as they were proposed by the IOM. The IOM also recommended that beverages be limited to water, low and no fat milk and 100% fruit juice. No soft drinks during the school day according to the IOM. The State Board of Education would also have adopted this standard, but there is a state statute allowing county boards of education to sell soft drinks in high schools. Efforts to allow the State Board of Education to set standards for beverages in schools -- and they would have banned soft drinks during the school day -- were defeated by the soft drink industry.

Clearly, if we are going to bring about health care reform, we need to build a citizen movement for reform.

West Virginians died because they had no health insurance.

•Across the nation, in 2006, "twice as many people died from lack of health insurance as died from homicide."

Report Recommends Expansion of West Virginia CHIP

A report issued by the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy has recommended that the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in West Virginia be expanded to 250 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). If adopted by the CHIP Board, expanding to 250 percent would allow a family with a single mom and two children earning \$43,000 a year to have the children covered with health insurance.

The report, which can be accessed at www.wvpolicy.org, stated in part: "West Virginia should take advantage of the federal funds available to expand coverage to more children. The state has one of the highest SCHIP match rates in the country with about 81 percent of the program costs supported with federal dollars. The WVCHIP expansion from 200 to 220 percent of the federal poverty level that started in January 2007 added a modest 262 children to the program as of March 2008. An expansion from 200 to 250 percent is estimated to add a total of 902 children or an additional 640 children."

The report concluded: "The importance of SCHIP to families cannot be over estimated. With SCHIP coverage, children receive important preventive services; children have a better chance of having physical, emotional, social and behavioral problems addressed early. With good health care in the early years, children will be better prepared for school, and will have much better odds of becoming productive adults. A small affordable state investment can help to ensure that middle income families trying to make ends meet can afford health care for their children."

Membership Form

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care

Yes, I want to be a part of helping to reform health care in West Virginia.

Enclosed is my contribution for \$50____ \$75____ \$100____

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City:_____ State:_____ Zip _____

Email Address : _____

(Please print clearly)

I would like to volunteer for WVAHC. Please contact me.

Please return your membership form to:

WVAHC, 1544 Lee Street, Charleston, West Virginia 25311.

--Thank you!

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