

Labor, Business, Medical Leaders Launch *America's Agenda: Health Care for All, Aiming To "Break the Insurance Lobby Choke-hold on Health Care"*

WASHINGTON, DC, October 7 -- "There will be no health care for *all* Americans until our political leaders are willing to take on a health insurance industry that showers them with cash," said Douglas Dority today as he announced the launching of *America's Agenda: Health Care for All*. "Insurers have proven time and time again they will spend whatever it takes to perpetuate a system of financing that makes them wealthy while restricting care only to those who can afford it."

Dority, chair of the new organization that will help grassroots groups fighting for universal health care, is the former president of the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW). He was joined by other union leaders, and by health care reform advocates from the business and medical communities and from Capitol Hill.

"The insurance companies with their scandalous profit-taking deny access to care to even those *with* insurance by practices of excluding pre-existing conditions, complex paperwork and uncovered benefits," said Dr. Claudia Fegan, president of the Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP). "Over 12,000 physicians support a national health insurance program that will cover everyone with the money we would save from the administrative waste of our current system."

U.S. Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) said "it is time to put 'health care for all' at the top of our national agenda." She has introduced a bill that would give federal funding to states that institute programs expanding access to health care. Rep. Baldwin and Dr. Fegan have agreed to serve on the Advisory Committee for *America's Agenda*.

"Our medical system is dysfunctional and bad not just for our health, but for our entire economy," said Bernard Rapoport, founder and former CEO of the American Income Life Insurance Company. Rapoport, a member of the *America's Agenda* governing board, said "soaring costs are undermining the competitiveness of American business in the global economy. The U.S. is the only country in the industrialized world that doesn't have publicly-financed health insurance, so American companies are burdened with expenses others don't have, endangering our manufacturing base." As examples, he cited Ford Motor Co. that spends \$3.2 billion a year on health premiums and General Motors that spends more on health than on steel.

"The American people are fed up," said Dority. "Poll after poll shows they want affordable health care that covers everyone. Why don't we have it? Because America's health insurance industry does everything in its power to block it. The current system may be a shambles, but it is a *profitable* shambles for those who run it."

Joe Hansen, Dority's successor as UFCW president and an *America's Agenda* board member, renewed the union's commitment to universal health care. "No one union, no one company, has a solution for the health care crisis," said Hansen. "It has to be a political solution."

"Out of control health care costs are a huge problem not just for workers but for employers who have health care plans," said Marty Maddaloni, general president of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters. "It puts these employers at a competitive disadvantage with those who do not have such plans."

"I can think of no economic issue that impacts all working families in America more than the growing health care crisis," added Morty Bahr, president of the Communications Workers of America. "It is criminal that 45 million Americans are without any health insurance and that number is projected to go to more than 51 million in 2006." Both Bahr and Maddaloni serve on the governing board of *America's Agenda*.

Dority noted that in recent years concerned citizens from Massachusetts to New Mexico have waged statewide campaigns for universal coverage. Additionally, health care reform initiatives and legislative hearings are progressing in several states, "but the industry continues to spend astronomical amounts of money to defeat them."

Health insurers all across the nation have come together to create America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) to lobby for the status quo. AHIP will run a multi-million dollar campaign with offices in 46 different states. "In the recent past, effort after effort by state-level grassroots groups to reform our broken health care system has been defeated by the well-heeled health insurance lobby," Dority said. "We intend to help level the playing field. We must break the insurance lobby choke-hold on U.S. health care."

To support grassroots groups, Dority said that *America's Agenda: Healthcare for All* will utilize TV, radio, print media and the Internet to mount creative and coordinated "truth campaigns". Business leaders, physicians, elected officials, labor leaders and universal health care campaign activists will be effective "messengers of truth" about the costs and benefits of specific health reform proposals.

"We will counter the insurance lobbyists by taking the truth to the American people," said Dority.

Until recently, Dority was president of the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW), a union whose members have been in the forefront of the battle to protect health benefits on the job. This past winter, tens of thousands of grocery workers were forced into bitter strikes in California, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia, in an effort to hold the line for workers across the nation whose health benefits were under attack. Dority didn't blame the employers-- he blamed the system. In March, he announced he was stepping down at UFCW "to devote my energies to a new effort to convince our political leaders that health care for all Americans is long overdue."

See pdf version of two of the four full-page ads that will appear in the New York Times: [*Your Health Care Dollars at Work: Fighting Against Universal Health Coverage, and Health Insurance Profits: Dangerous to America's Health.*](#)
The first ad will run Friday, October 8