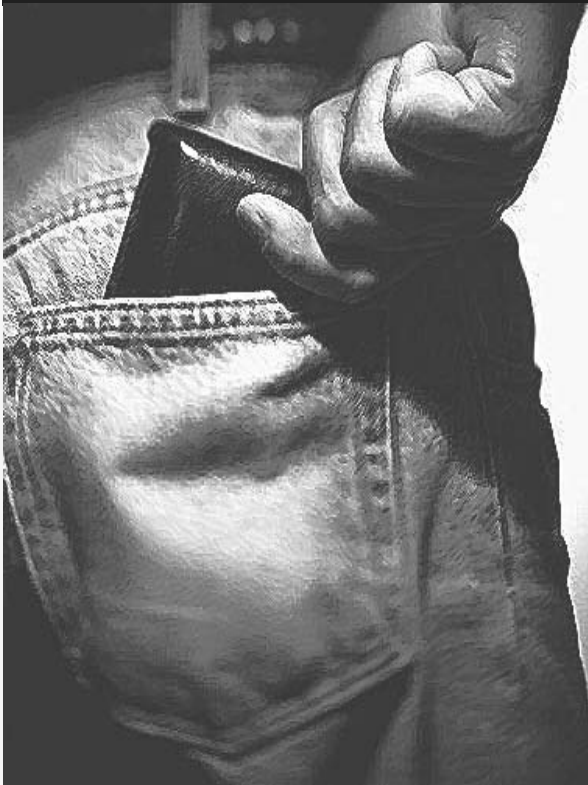


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# SEIU joins with AARP and business groups to push for universal health care

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — A coalition of four influential but divergent groups pushing to put universal health care on the national agenda, will not pick a single health care plan to promote, says the sole union leader among the group, Service Employees President Andy Stern.

Instead, he told Press Associates Inc. Union News Service that "Divided We Fail" will keep pushing principles for universal affordable health care so the issue will be the top domestic priority in next year's election — and so Congress and the next president must tackle the issue under political pressure to achieve that goal, and with backing to do so.

The coalition is comprised of SEIU, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the Business Round-

table and the National Federation of Independent Business. NFIB joined the group Nov. 1.

NFIB spokeswoman Stephanie Cathcart said after a Divided We Fail press conference that her group's members "have been telling its leaders for 25 years that providing health care was their number one problem" and urging it to do something positive to help them solve the dilemma.

The new NFIB president, Todd Stottlemeyer, listened, and joined Divided We Fail, she said.

But Divided We Fail has decided, unlike the Democratic presidential hopefuls, not to hammer out a specific plan, Stern said. It would become just a forgotten sheaf of paper, he explained. Most GOP hopefuls have yet to be specific on health care.

What Divided We Fail wants to do is push health care to the forefront of the electoral discussion and try to set up a debate on the issue between the Democratic and Republican nominees, once the parties settle on them.

"You would hope by the time we elect someone" next November "there would be a mandate to do something on the Number 1 domestic issue,"

Stern said at the press conference.

"We're coming together. Now the politicians need to come together," said AARP chief executive officer William Novelli. Novelli is a Republican operative whose ad agency created the infamous "Harry and Louise" ad campaign that helped sink national health care reform in 1994 by the Clinton Administration.

"The objective is universal access to quality health care," Stottlemeyer said.

**"The objective is universal access to quality health care."**

**Todd Stottlemeyer, President  
National Federation  
of Independent Business**

Stern called it "big news," since NFIB has historically been the most conservative on health care issues.

"We pre-agreed on the principles" of affordable universal quality health care without burdening future generations with high costs,

emphasis on wellness efforts and prevention and giving people choices in long-term care, he explained. Other parts of the Divided We Fail platform deal with retirement security and savings incentives.

"But we would get ourselves in trouble if we tried to do specifics, as the AFL-CIO has gotten in trouble," Stern said. The federation, which SEIU is no longer part of, recently launched its own campaign to make affordable universal health care the top domestic issue from now through the election. But it, too, has not chosen a specific plan to back. That will occur afterwards, says campaign chair Heather Booth.

But the hopes of both Stern's group and the AFL-CIO hinge on the outcome of the election, since the Democratic hopefuls have offered specific plans while the GOP by and large has stuck with Bush's plan to promote health savings accounts.

Several of the Republicans, however, are beginning to think of health care as a national problem requiring a national solution, Stern said.

"This election has got to be about health care and the war. The Democrats' starting place and the Republicans' starting place, on both issues, are very different," he said. "Our role in SEIU from now until then will be giving people information on where the candidates stand."

But it's up to the hopefuls — not Divided We Fail — to fill in the blanks, he said.

"They have to come as close to a piece of legislation as possible, so that we won't wait for a year after they take office — and so that we have a constituency really ready to push it," Stern concluded.



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