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Rallying for reform

Stuart Fishman, a member of United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555, shows support for single-payer health care at a Portland rally Sept. 22 targeting health insurance companies, in this case Blue Cross Blue Shield of Oregon. The rally took place at Pettygrove Park downtown, next to the insurance company headquarters. Organized by Health Care for America Now, it was part of a national series of more than 100 events with the theme "Big Insurance: We're Sick of It." Health Care for America Now, a coalition that includes AFL-CIO and Change to Win unions, is organizing to support the "public health insurance option" proposed by Barack Obama during his 2008 presidential campaign. At this rally, supporters of the public option and single payer found common ground in criticizing insurance companies for being part of the problem.



Freightliner won't close Portland plant

Company may seek concessions from union workers in upcoming bargaining

Workers at the Portland Freightliner plant got a reprieve Sept. 28 when Daimler Trucks North America announced their facility won't close June 2010 as previously announced.

The heavily-downsized plant employs 425 members of Machinists Lodge 1005; 90 members of Teamsters Local 305; 66 members of Painters Local 1094; and 18 members of Service Employees Local 49.

The plant makes Freightliner mili-

tary vehicles and the Western Star line of specialized trucks. Daimler just got a large order from the U.S. Army's Tank Automotive Command, and that may have figured in the decision to halt the planned closure. Roger Nielsen, Daimler Trucks North America chief operating officer, said in a press statement that the company would prefer to focus on timely delivery, without the interruption or distraction of a move.

The company was planning to switch the military production to its North Carolina plant, and Western Star production to its plant in Santiago Tanguistenco, Mexico. Instead, the military trucks will be made in Portland and in Cleveland, North Carolina, while plans

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AFL-CIO convention endorses single-payer plan

PITTSBURGH — In a historic vote, the AFL-CIO at its national convention Sept. 15-18 unanimously endorsed a single-payer health care system as the best way to guarantee health care to everyone.

Resolution 34 — sponsored by the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and the Alameda County (California) Central Labor Council — puts the AFL-CIO on record in support of single-payer, which would essentially expand and improve Medicare to cover all Americans.

At least 70 "single-payer" resolutions were submitted to the convention by various unions and labor councils. Those resolutions were combined into one resolution.

More than 575 labor organizations, including 136 central labor councils, 22 international and national unions, and 39 state AFL-CIOs (Oregon and Washington among them) have endorsed a specific plan introduced in the House of Representatives — HR 676.

Resolution 34 notes that "the experience of Medicare (and of nearly every other industrialized country) shows the most cost-effective and equitable way to provide quality health care is through

a single-payer system. Our nation should provide a single high standard of comprehensive care for all."

It also cites HR 676, which has 86 co-sponsors in Congress.

The vote came shortly after the convention was addressed by President Barack Obama, who repeated his call for comprehensive health care reform.

The night before, the California Nurses Association co-hosted a reception featuring filmmaker Michael Moore. In his speech, Moore recalled

that 65 years ago President Franklin Roosevelt proposed a second bill of rights which called for a right to universal medical care, a fight that continues. He noted that every day the health care industry spends over \$1 million to block reform while thousands of Americans continue to lose coverage, and urged labor and community activists to keep up the fight.

Rich Trumka, in his speech to delegates immediately after being elected president of the AFL-CIO on Sept. 18,

reiterated his support for single payer health care telling the delegates: "Now, I know that a lot of us would prefer a single payer plan. I sure would."

Union officials were in agreement that regardless of the outcome of the current health care legislative action, organized labor will continue to fight to make sure every single American gets high quality health care.

"The labor movement needs to set our flag on the top of the mountain, and that we will not rest until we have sin-

gle-payer health care for all," said Greg Junemann, president of International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers and chair of the HR 676 Labor Caucus.

California Nurses Association Executive Director and AFL-CIO Vice President Rose Ann DeMoro welcomed the many international guests attending the convention, and noted how most of them represent industrial nations where no one dies from lack of health coverage or goes bankrupt or loses homes due to unpayable medical bills.

"The reason? Because they have single-payer or other national health care systems, and because your labor movement led the fight for health care," DeMoro said. "Here, insurance companies are at the apex of power, controlling our lives. It is not the public option we should be questioning, it is the private option and its horrendous power over our families.

"When we meet again in four years, perhaps if we adopt single-payer," she continued, "we will be like all our international brothers and sisters in this room, and no longer be the richest nation in the world but just 37th in health-care."

One in six Oregonians lack health insurance

As congressional debate on reforming the nation's health care system continues, a federal survey released Sept. 22 confirms that about one in six Oregonians lacked health insurance at some point in 2008.

The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) also reported that the income of the typical Oregon household in 2008 remained unchanged from the year prior and the start of the decade.

The current levels of health coverage and household median income are "likely worse today," because the ACS

did not cover the deepest period of the recession, said Joy Margheim, policy analyst with the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

Inquiring for the first time on health coverage, the ACS found that 16.4 percent of the state's population — about 614,562 Oregonians — lacked health insurance coverage.

"Today's data offer yet another clear message to Congress of the urgent need for affordable, comprehensive health insurance coverage for everyone," Margheim said.

An estimated 110,421 Oregon chil-

dren, or 12.8 percent, lacked health insurance, the survey reported.

The survey results on health coverage are in line with the results of the Current Population Survey (CPS), released last month, though Margheim cautioned that because of differences in the questions and survey designs, the two surveys cannot be compared directly.

The Oregon Center for Public Policy is a non-partisan research institute that does in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax and economic issues.