



Amy Chesbrough is a registered nurse at the Portland VA Medical Center, a member of American Federation of Government Employees, and a believer in universal health care. On Aug. 23, she and 100 others protested Oregon Congressman Greg Walden for his support of a bill that would have left 22 million more Americans uninsured. But that's in addition to the 28 million who are still uninsured even under the Affordable Care Act. As the AFL-CIO said in a July 26 statement, "although the ACA has made it possible for many more people to buy comprehensive health plans from insurance companies, it has not guaranteed everyone could afford the health care they need. Instead, many people face steep deductibles, copayments and coinsurance that create overwhelming barriers to care."

...Medicare For All

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In 2017, premiums reached an average of \$1,564 a month for employer-sponsored health insurance that covers an employee and family, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Enter Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who called for extending Medicare to all Americans during his 2016 campaign for president. Sanders lost the Democratic primary, but today polls say he's the most popular politician in America, and his Medicare for All bill has more co-sponsors than ever. When Sanders introduced his Medicare for All bill in 2013, not a single U.S. senator co-sponsored it. Introduced again Sept. 13, his bill had 16 cosponsors. Meanwhile, the House version, introduced once again this year by Conyers, has 120 Congressional cosponsors, up from 62 in 2015.

Polls show 53 to 60 percent of Americans are now in favor of Medicare for All, compared to 23 percent who oppose the idea. The percentage in favor

MEDICARE FOR ALL CO-SPONSORS:

- U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley
- U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer
- U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici
- U.S. Rep. Peter Defazio

has been steadily increasing for the last 20 years.

Medicare for All is not expected to pass while Republicans control the House and Senate, but it could if Democrats win back Congressional majorities and the White House.

Organized labor, which was instrumental in passing Medicare in the first place, has long supported its expansion into a universal program. More than a dozen international unions and hundreds of local unions and central labor councils have endorsed the concept of Medicare for All. And the national AFL-CIO Executive Council reiterated the labor federation's support for it in a July 26, 2017, statement: "Our core goal ... is to move expeditiously toward a single-payer system, like Medicare for All, that retains a role for workers' health plans

and in which access to quality, affordable health care is indeed a right for everyone in this country."

The Sanders and Conyers bills don't say what would happen to union-sponsored multi-employer health trusts that cover more than 10 million union members and their dependents. In Canada, where everyone is covered by public health insurance programs administered at the provincial level, unions negotiate with employers to provide supplemental health benefits.

Unions have fought hard to secure health insurance benefits for members, but the ever-increasing burden of paying for them has become the number one source of conflict with employers. Health insurance also eats up employer resources that could otherwise go to raises or other benefits. Taking health care off the bargaining table could relieve employers of a burden that their foreign competitors don't have.

How the Sanders bill would work

- Lower the Medicare eligibility age, in phases: Year 1 to age 45; Year 2 to 55; Year 3 to 35; Year 4 to everyone
- Expand Medicare coverage to include dental and vision care
- End the prohibition on the government using its bargaining power to get better drug prices from pharmaceutical companies

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