

HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICA NOW!

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release
Friday, June 26th 2009

MAINERS RALLY AGAINST ANTHEM

Bangor - Nearly 100 supporters of universal health attended a rally in downtown Bangor today to protest what they allege are unscrupulous practices by Maine health insurance giant Anthem and other private health insurance companies and to advocate for a federal public health insurance option.

"The pillars of our health care system have failed," said Dr. Benjamin Shaefer, a Bangor cardiologist and member of the National Physicians Alliance who addressed the rally. "We need a public healthcare insurance option now, not to control healthcare but to save it. In my opinion, conservatives in Congress are out of touch with what the American people want."

Health insurance premiums in Maine increased nearly 90% from 2002 to 2007, 5.4 times faster than the median income. During this time, Anthem maintained a 50%-90% monopoly on the state's individual and small group insurance market. These hikes forced many Mainers to drop or reduce their health insurance coverage.

"We have a huge problem with uninsured and underinsured people in Maine and the country," said Alice Knapp, a lawyer and former health insurance regulator. "These folks are paying for benefits that they and their family need but they can't afford. It's like paying for a public education system that their kids are not allowed to attend."

On Wednesday, the Senate Commerce Committee released a report by congressional investigators showing that large health insurers including Wellpoint, Anthem's parent company, have been systematically underpaying millions of valid insurance claims. Rally participants said this kind of behavior is simply part of the way insurance companies do business.

"Administrators of private insurance companies' first responsibility by law is to their board of directors and the board's first responsibility is to their shareholders. That responsibility is fiscal first," said Dr. Elizabeth Weiss, a Bangor physician. "Their products are designed to maximize profit and not the public's health. Thinking about health care as a commodity has been the downfall of our system."

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Health Care for America Now - the nation's largest health care campaign - is made up of more than 1000 organizations representing more than 30 million people nationwide. President Obama and more than 190 Members of Congress support HCAN's principles for health care reform. All across the country, HCAN supporters are organized and mobilized to stress the urgent need for health care reform in 2009, reform that finally puts health care needs before insurance company profits.