

HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICA NOW!

PRESS RELEASE

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RALLY FOR A PUBLIC OPTION

Frustrated by Maine's health care crisis, dozens of Mainers gathered in Lincoln Park in Portland today to speak out against the rising premiums and increasing profits of Anthem, Maine's largest insurance company. The crowd then marched to the offices of Senators Snowe and Collins to show their support for federal health care reform, including a public health care option.

"America is in the midst of a health care crisis that affects our families, our businesses and our communities," said Maine Senate Majority Leader Phil Bartlett, speaking at the rally. "Swift action is needed in Washington to make health care more affordable and accessible to everyone."

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

"I couldn't afford health insurance in Maine when I made \$11.00 per hour," said Allison Fichera of South Portland. "Now, one of every four Mainers like me is uninsured, and I still can't buy any of Anthem's expensive plans. To get affordable health care, I need a public option."

Rally attendees also heard how health insurance premium increases have placed a particular strain on Maine's small businesses.

"Anthem made \$75 million in profits last year, and they are trying to raise rates 20 percent this year in a depression economy. Wish I could do that," said Sandra Good, the owner of Fotoshops, a camera store in downtown Portland and a member of the Maine Small Business Coalition. "We want Senator Snowe and Senator Collins to support the creation of a public health care plan option. For many of us, it's that or we go out of business."

The importance of Senators Snowe and Collins in enacting federal health care reform was a theme throughout the event, with participants rejecting the idea of a "trigger" mechanism that would delay the implementation of a public plan and give health insurance companies another chance to offer affordable care.

"For the first time in decades, we have a real chance to make sure everyone in America has access to quality health care," said Marianne von Nordeck, Maine Political Coordinator for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. "For-profit insurance companies have consistently and completely failed to deliver adequate health care. It's time Maine people had an affordable, public choice."

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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.