



PRESS RELEASE – August 29th

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Hundreds Rally in Orlando for Quality Health Care – Pledge to Get the Job Done on Health Care Reform.

Rally participants honor the late Senator Edward Kennedy and promise to make his dream of health care for all a reality.

Orlando – Hundreds of supporters of health care reform from across the state gathered at a rally today in downtown Orlando to call on Florida’s congressional delegation to support President Obama’s push to bring quality health care to all Americans. The rally, organized by a broad coalition of community groups, labor unions, religious organizations and retirees, united under the banner Health Care for America NOW! (HCAN) was a celebration of the promise of real health care reform in the coming weeks and a call to action for advocates and activists all over Florida to step up the fight in the days and weeks ahead. Rally participants also paid tribute to the late Senator Edward Kennedy who worked tirelessly right up until his death to secure quality health care for all Americans, pledging to keep his dream alive and deliver health care reform in his memory.

The rally included several rousing speeches by leaders for health care reform and a panel of individuals sharing their experiences with the current health care system, making the case for immediate and comprehensive reform. The organizations under the HCAN banner all support a reform package that includes the choice for a strong public option, provisions to ensure that big business pays their fair share of health care costs, shoring up Medicare and that does not tax employer sponsored health care benefits for working families.

During the panel discussion, several members of the audience were given the opportunity to ask questions. One of the questioners was Sonia Pierre, a nurse practitioner at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, the third-largest public hospital in the nation. Pierre has been a Jackson employee for 27 years. She said she regularly treats uninsured patients who repeatedly end up in the emergency room because they have no access to primary care. She said that the reform being considered in Washington could alleviate overcrowded emergency rooms. She said, “These patients have no other way to get health care, they can’t afford medications, so they keep

coming back to the emergency room. If they could afford proper health care, this wouldn't happen. I've seen patients spend two days in the emergency room waiting for care. We could avoid this catastrophe in the emergency room if we had more primary care available. Prevention is key."

Another questioner, Marcia Wagshol, is a small business owner from Lake Worth. She said, "My husband and I own a small accounting firm and high premiums are suffocating our business. Without serious changes to health care, small businesses like ours will be at risk of closing their doors and laying off their workers." Small businesses like Marcia's have suffered greatly over the past several years as health care premiums have skyrocketed.

Providing the choice of a public insurance option will lower premiums for both small businesses and individuals by bringing much needed competition to the market place. It will also help provide affordable insurance to those currently lacking coverage and thus have little to no access to primary care. The provisions that require big businesses to provide coverage for their employees or pay into a public pool will also help by providing coverage for the thousands of workers who currently can't get insurance from their employers, or by making the resources available for them to receive public insurance. These reform measures, plus those that increase efficiencies, and reform health insurance regulations will lower costs, increase access to health care and reduce the need for emergency medicine.

While many political pundits and operatives have tried to handicap what they see as a political horse race, speculating that major reform will not survive this process, the activists at the rally had no doubt that they would keep up the fight and ensure that meaningful reform passes in the next few weeks. They collectively pledged to ramp up their efforts in their respective communities in grass roots fashion; knocking on doors, collecting petitions and letters and making thousands of calls to their elected officials so that there would be doubt in Washington that the people of Florida want reform now.

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