

Coalition Presses Candidates To Back Universal Health Care

by Patricia Salisbury

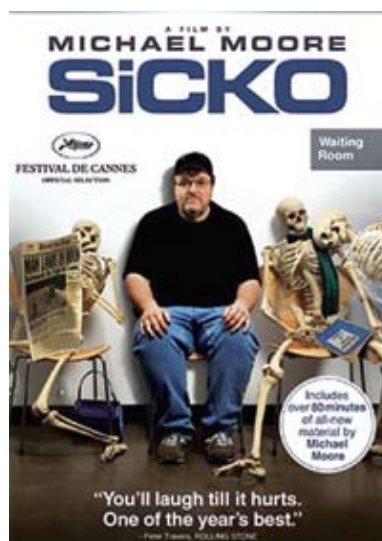
A challenge to Presidential candidates to make good on campaign promises to provide universal health care was issued by a coalition mobilizing for H.R. 676, the single-payer “Medicare-for-All” bill introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.). The challenge was issued at the National Press Club Nov. 6, along with the announcement of the release of the DVD version of “Sicko,” filmmaker Michael Moore’s devastating critique of the U.S. health-care industry. Moore, who spoke at the Washington event via satellite hookup, was introduced by Conyers. They joined leaders of the Physicians for a National Health Program and the California Nurses Association, who are leading the mobilization for the resolution, which currently has 85 co-sponsors.

Moore’s film, released in theaters last June 29, documents the criminal denial of health care to huge segments of the U.S. population—both the 47 million who are uninsured, and those who pay for insurance, yet are denied treatment by profit-driven insurance companies.

Moore began by saying that it boggles the mind that the SCHIP children’s health program, which extends health coverage to uninsured children, was vetoed by the President, and that something so fundamental could actually be the subject of debate in Congress. He noted that poll after poll has shown that Americans favor a universal health-care system, and that we need to move forward with this, despite the opposition of the health insurance industry and a number of right-wing Republicans.

Moore poked fun at the efforts of Republican Presidential frontrunner Rudy Giuliani to distort statistics to claim that his treatment for prostate cancer would not have fared well under “socialized medicine,” such as the English National Healthcare system. However, Moore cautioned that it is not just the Republican candidates who need to be held accountable. Much work, he declared, needs to be done in the Democratic Party, particularly with the Presidential candidates, many of whom, he said, have not gone far enough on health care.

While all the so-called major Democratic candidates claim to have a universal health-care plan as part of their program, Moore pointed out that in every case (with the exception of Rep. Dennis Kucinich (Ohio), an H.R. 676 co-sponsor) their rhetoric conceals plans to have the rapacious health insurance companies “remain at the table,” controlling what-



ever national resources are devoted to health care. “If you give the other side a little bit, Moore declared, “that is not the end of it. They will control the game.”

In April 2006, Lyndon LaRouche, who had previously called for abolishing the HMO system, endorsed the Conyers resolution, stating that it was a litmus test of the morality of the Congress and its

commitment to the general welfare.

Following the press conference, the the resolution Coalition members departed for Capitol Hill to deliver a copy of the “Sicko” DVD and information on H.R. 676 to every member of Congress. Delegations delivered DVDs to the offices of Sens. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) and Barak Obama (D-Ill.). Many members of the Coalition then attended the National Convention of American Public Health Association at the Washington, D.C. Convention Center, where Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) held a standing-room-only workshop, and where Representative Conyers presided at a meeting of the P. Ellen Parsons Memorial Session, where H.R. 676 was again discussed.

Insurance or Extortion?

At the PNCP workshop, particular attention was paid to the Massachusetts health-care model, widely touted as bipartisan legislation which will achieve universal coverage, by mandating that every individual purchase health insurance, much as they do car insurance. In fact, the panelists argued, the Massachusetts model continues the windfall for the managed-care insurance companies, and will force many middle class families to purchase “junk insurance” plans, with high deductibles and co-pays.

While the deadline for enrollment in a plan is January 2008, only 25% of Massachusetts citizens had enrolled as of July. Those who fail to sign up by the deadline will face fines up to \$1,000. At the earlier press conference, members of the California Nurses Association had denounced the Massachusetts plan “as nothing more than extortion,” forcing people to pay for virtually worthless health insurance.

LaRouche PAC organizers had a significant presence at both the press conference and the convention, where hundreds of copies of the Lyndon LaRouche’s Homeowners and Bank Protection Act were circulated, and numbers of health-care activists expressed interest in working for its passage.