

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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Health Care Debate Hits the Big Screen *Sicko* *Renews Conversation in D.C.*

Can a new sharp-edged documentary change the health care system? Without question, the release late last month of the documentary *Sicko* has renewed the health care debate in Washington and has health care lobbyists running for the Hill. Filmmaker Michael Moore, who directed and produced the controversial films *Roger & Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, now turns his lens on America's fractured health care system and the public and corporate interests that uphold it. Marking the second largest "first weekend box office" for a documentary in the history of movies, *Sicko* follows the all-too-familiar human tragedies of a system that considers health services a marketable, and exceedingly profitable, commodity. Compelling footage features the impossible choices made by uninsured Americans, the fatal consequences of denying necessary services, the recent trend of "hospital dumping" in Los Angeles, and the health systems of other nations in which care is indeed considered a human right. According to the New York Times, elected officials and policy experts predict the film will have a "broad political impact."

To Whom is Congress Listening?

Even as opinion polls reveal repeatedly that the majority of Americans favor a national system of universal health coverage, the majority of Americans aren't being heard in Washington. Large pharmaceutical companies have only increased their dominance on the Hill in recent years, spending 34% more for lobbying purposes since 2003. And according to the Center for Responsive Politics, the Capitol is abuzz with four times as many health care lobbyists as there are members of Congress (www.opensecrets.org), thus making Congress itself and health care reform advocates the undisputed underdogs. Industry insiders also maintain a strong presence on the presidential campaign trail. Democratic and Republican presidential candidates have accepted more than \$3.7 million in campaign donations from the health care industry this year alone (www.calnurse.org).

Universal Health Care: No Sick Joke

For thousands of insured and uninsured Americans (and of course for *Mobilizer* readers) the film's vivid illustrations of health system failure, corporate greed, medical bankruptcy, and preventable death will come as no surprise in a nation without a commitment to health care as a right of citizenship. The compelling human stories depicted in Moore's film (stories revealing the painful experience of being denied necessary treatment) are tragically juxtaposed with industry analyses of the relationship between service denial and insurance company profit. And though the intent of *Sicko* is more about holding up a mirror than outlining prescriptive solutions, some of the film's most uplifting and hopeful moments come when Moore debunks negative myths about the health care systems of other industrialized democracies by visiting England, France, Canada, and Cuba –

where health care is viewed as a right rather than a privilege and where all residents benefit from equal access to care.

The Single Payer Cure

Prior to *Sicko*'s release at a June 20 press conference in Washington, D.C., Michael Moore joined the National Council in publicly supporting the "single payer" model outlined in H.R. 676 – *The United States National Health Insurance Act*, also known as *Expanded and Improved Medicare for All*. Joined by the bill's sponsors Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) and Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), Moore provided testimony at a Capitol Hill hearing and invited all Members of Congress and health care lobbyists for a special screening of the film.

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council calls upon *Mobilizer* readers to capitalize on the renewed opportunity that *Sicko* provides to engage in the health care debate.

ACTION:

- **Organize your staff and clients to see the film *Sicko*.** Since June 29, *Sicko* has played in theatres across the country. Work within your agency to organize a viewing of the documentary as an agency activity. Contact a local theatre in your community to negotiate a discounted rate for your agency, and coordinate an appropriate time to bring staff to see the movie. Invite community partners and public policy makers to join you. Information about *Sicko* is posted on the Council's website – www.nhchc.org. Following the film, schedule a debriefing session for staff and clients to discuss the film. (The pending release of the DVD version will provide additional opportunities to show the film at your organization.)
- **Read the National HCH Council's 2007 policy statement on universal health care** at <http://www.nhchc.org/Advocacy/PolicyPapers/policystatements.html>
- **Endorse H.R. 676.** By endorsing this legislation you are publicly showing your organization's support for single payer health care and working actively toward the realization of the human right to health care. Sign on by visiting Physicians for a National Health Plan at <http://pnhp.org/resolution/>.
- **Call, write or visit your Members of Congress.** H.R.676 currently is co-sponsored by 75 members of the House of representative and has never been introduced in the Senate. Encourage your Congressional Representative to sponsor H.R.676 and ask your Senator to introduce a companion bill. Find out who represents you at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.

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