



uniting consumers to achieve affordable, high quality health care for all

## 2008- 6 September-October, 2008



Photo Credit Pam Whyte

### **Consumer Health Care Advocates Raised Signs, Donned Construction Hats and Called on Lawmakers and Candidates to Fix It Now!**

More than 30 people joined OCHC to kick off its **Fix It Now!** campaign on August 25 at the Ohio Statehouse. Wearing construction hats and raising construction signs, consumers gathered with one simple message, "Fix It Now!"

"Ohioans cannot wait any longer for relief from skyrocketing health care costs, unfair insurance rules, and lack of access to care," said Cathy Levine, Co-Chair of Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage. "We call on Ohio's elected officials and candidates to make health care reform their top priority and to Fix It Now!"

Since the kick-off OCHC members and staff have followed federal and state candidates to Athens, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Toledo

to hold signs, ask questions and gather petitions to "Fix Health Care Now!"

The electoral debate has turned back towards health care, both at the federal and state levels. OCHC representatives have met with 20 candidates through forums and personal meetings in Athens, Cleveland, Hudson, Toledo, Cincinnati and Columbus. □

#### **OCHC Quarterly Meeting:**

Wednesday, **November 12**, 2008, First Congregational Church, 444 E. Broad. This will be a great opportunity to share experiences with others doing health care advocacy around the state and to look at the post-election landscape and plan next steps in reforming health care in Ohio. For more information go to [www.ohioconsumersforhealth.org](http://www.ohioconsumersforhealth.org)

#### **Hamilton County House Race Forum Draws 100**

If you walked by Cincinnati's Bush Recreation Center on September 6<sup>th</sup> with the soft jazzy sounds of Wild Forest Blackberry wafting across the sunny grounds, you might not have guessed that the serious business of deciding an election was about to begin inside.

But that day nearly 100 people gathered to hear five candidates from House Districts 29, 31, 32 and 34 speak to voters at a forum sponsored by the Southwest Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage.

In attendance were candidates Denise Driehaus (D-HD 31), Louis Blessing (R-HD 29), Adam Noe (D-HD 29), Theo Barnes (R-HD 32) Jeff Sinard (D-HD 34). Don Hoffman, President and CEO of the Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, moderated the program.

A few observations -- there was a wide variation in solutions to the health care crisis with some candidates emphasizing a significant role for government and others relying more on market solutions including health savings accounts. Several candidates talked about the need to pull experts into the room to work out a solution. The good news for Hamilton County is that all five of the candidates who came recognized health care and the large number of uninsured as a big problem and are ready to look for solutions. Well, good news! We're ready to work with them. □



*House District 20 Candidates Nancy Garland (D) and Jim McGregor (R). Photo Credit Kathleen Gmeiner*

### **Six Franklin County House Candidates Spar Over Health Care**

Seventy people gathered during the lunch hour on October 22, 2008 at downtown Columbus Trinity Episcopal Church to hear six of eight candidates' for Ohio House Districts 19, 20, 22 and 24. Sponsored by Central Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage and moderated by League of Women Voters of Ohio Health Committee Chair

Eleanor Pearlman, the event was one of the few in Central Ohio to give voters so much detail on candidate's view of the state of health care in Ohio. Candidates attending were Marian Harris (D) and Brad Lewis (R) competing in House District 19; Nancy Garland (D) and Jim McGregor (R) vying to represent House District 20, John Carney (D) seeking to represent House District 22 and Ted Celeste (D) competing in House District 24.

The good news is that all of the candidates recognized that health care is a big issue, here to stay, and needs attention. They had varying views on solutions.

There was disagreement on the effectiveness of the Medicaid safety net and of high risk pools as responses to our large number of uninsured Ohioans. No candidate accepted the status quo that insurance companies may deny health coverage based upon pre-existing conditions. There was general agreement on the importance of the patient-physician relationship and the need to protect it from interference by insurance companies.

A lot of emphasis was put on the need for prevention, incentives to keep people well and the role institutions like schools play in fostering good health.

While most candidates were highly concerned about the scope of the problem, one candidate observed that there has been improvement in access to care in rural areas.

For OCHC the good news is that we know there are six candidates who know who we are and ready to tackle the health care crisis if elected. □



Go On-Line ...

### Before It's Too Late

No matter how many times the presidential candidates visit Ohio, the fact remains that our health care system is broken.

Too many Ohioans can't get insurance or are afraid to change jobs because they have some "pre-existing condition." More than one million Ohioans have no insurance at all. In these tough economic times it is getting harder and harder for small businesses to offer health insurance to their employees.

For those lucky enough to have coverage, we have no control over the size of premiums, deductibles, co-pays, how much the insurance companies will pay and what they cover, and we have no choice but to take what is offered.

**Had enough?** Participate now at [www.voicesforhealthcare.org](http://www.voicesforhealthcare.org)

What are **our choices** for improving health care in Ohio?

Find out with the Voices for Health Care online dialogue.

- **Learn** about the issue with **balanced** information
- **Discover** where you come out on some tough trade-offs, and see how your thoughts compare to others
- **Share** your views with Ohio decision-makers

Make **your** voice heard—Participate now at [www.voicesforhealthcare.org](http://www.voicesforhealthcare.org).

## Advocating for the Building Blocks Toward Affordable, High Quality Health Care for All

OCHC, through its Fix It Now! campaign activities, is building momentum leading up to the next legislative session and consideration of



the state budget. Through visibility at candidates' forums and events, collection of petition signature, and circulation of pledge cards, OCHC members are educating candidates and increasing its base of consumer support.

While OCHC's goal remains affordable, high quality health care for all, the economic and political realities around the state budget debate will give consumers the opportunity to advocate for building blocks for reform while working to find solutions and to shore up the political will to achieve the longer term goal continues.

Consistent with its principles for health care reform, OCHC will use the following approaches to educate consumers and advocate for their needs in the short term:

### Insurance Market Reforms

- ▶ Require insurers to offer coverage to everyone regardless of age or pre-existing conditions
- ▶ Ensure access to affordable, comprehensive coverage, regardless of prior health history, by narrowing the wide variation in how much people are charged for insurance
- ▶ Require insurers to spend at least 85% of premium dollars on health care, rather than on administration and profits
- ▶ Extend the age of dependent coverage on group policies to age 29

### **Public Coverage or Subsidies to Make Coverage Affordable**

- ▶ Provide subsidies to help low-wage workers afford employer-sponsored coverage
- ▶ Streamline enrollment process and enroll all eligible children and families in Medicaid
- ▶ Expand Medicaid to cover low-income parents up to 200% of the federal poverty level
- ▶ Create a Medicaid-like health plan for adults with incomes below poverty level
- ▶ Raise the protected income level for Medicaid up to 100% of the federal poverty level for Aged, Blind, and Disabled
- ▶ Create a Connector that offers standard benefit packages at affordable costs for people without access to employer coverage and provide subsidies on a sliding fee scale for people below 300% poverty

### **Shared Responsibility for Health Care Spending**

- ▶ Redirect existing state spending on health care to maximize effectiveness and to draw down new federal funds
- ▶ Recognize that hospitals, insurers, providers, employers, and consumers—according to their ability to pay—all need to contribute to the cost of coverage

### **Transparency and Accountability in Health Care Spending**

- ▶ Require insurers and hospitals to report their revenues and spending on health care, administration, benefits to the community, and profits

### **Increasing Quality and Cost Effectiveness of Care to Improve Outcomes**

- ▶ Recommend steps to ensure that Ohio has adequate numbers of providers in the future
- ▶ Increase funding to community health centers to expand access to

- ▶ Provide funding to develop local integrated delivery networks.

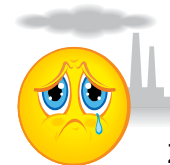
Many of these building blocks are included in the State Coverage Initiative Team's recommendations to Governor Strickland. As part of the Fix It Now! campaign, OCHC will continue to press the administration to act on these recommendations. □

### **Hellos and Good-byes**



UHCAN Ohio welcomes **Gary Benjamin and Sanford Holmes** to its staff. Gary

works in the Cleveland office, following many years of health care and other advocacy in Michigan where he has practiced law for many years. Sanford Holmes works in the Cincinnati office, following a successful military career, performing contract negotiations for Ohio Association of Public School Employees, and substitute teaching in the Dayton area. Both Gary and Sanford staff the local OCHC networks in their area. (see "Good-byes" page 5)



UHCAN Ohio is sad to say good-bye to **Audra Teague**.

Audra has been with UHCAN Ohio since the Spring of 2008. She has staffed the Central Ohio grassroots network, as well as the Community Conversations project and UHCAN Ohio's election education work. Audra will become the coordinator of the Interfaith Center for Peace in Central Ohio. We wish her well!

### **Other New Faces**

**UHCAN Ohio and Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage** has also benefited from the services of four contractors in the summer/fall. **Greg Beswick** with

Buckeye Strategies has provided Field Director services since August and **Joe Mazzola**, who recently left the Tobacco Prevention Foundation, has been building the grassroots network in the Summit and Geauga Counties region. **Janice Alvarado**, a long-time health care advocate in Cincinnati, and **Katy Heins**, community organizer, put together two important events in Southwest Ohio in Butler County in July and Cincinnati in September. □

### **November Grassroots Meetings**

#### ***Athens*** –Thursday, **November 6,**

6:30 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

Church of the Good Shepherd

64 University Terrace, Athens, 45701

RSVP [margaretdemko@gmail.com](mailto:margaretdemko@gmail.com)

#### ***Cincinnati*** – Tuesday, **November 11,**

2:30 – 4:00 P.M. , Carmel Presbyterian

Church, 3549 Reading Road, Cincinnati

45229

RSVP [sholmes@uhcanohio.org](mailto:sholmes@uhcanohio.org)

#### ***Cleveland*** -- Friday **November 21,** 9:30

– 11:00 A.M.—Trinity Cathedral, 2230

Euclid Avenue, Cleveland 44115

RSVP [gbenjamin@uhcanohio.org](mailto:gbenjamin@uhcanohio.org)

#### ***Columbus*** – Thursday, November 20

7:00 – 8:30 P.M., Trinity Lutheran Church,

404 S. Third St., Columbus 43215

RSVP [ateague@uhcanohio.org](mailto:ateague@uhcanohio.org)

[www.ohioconsumersforhealth.org](http://www.ohioconsumersforhealth.org)