

# Council #10



CUDAHY • FRANKLIN • GREENDALE • GREENFIELD • OAK CREEK • ST. FRANCIS • SOUTH MILWAUKEE

## Members Turnout to Defend School Budgets

As school district budgets were proposed and approved this fall, two Council #10 districts encountered controversy. In both districts anti-tax activists pushed for property tax levy freezes that, combined with reduced State aid, would have meant draconian cuts in staff and educational programs.

In Oak Creek, union members who live in the community turned out en masse to the Annual Meeting and sent a strong message that the community supports maintaining funding for the schools.

In Greenfield, union members worked with parents to turn out to the crucial budget meeting. Greenfield Education Association President, **Nancy Koeckenberg**, and President Elect, **Doug Perry**, sent the following message to their community coalition following the vote.

*"We just wanted to let you know that the Greenfield Schools' Board of Education voted 6 to 1 to approve the proposed levy increase. Their decision was as large a win for Greenfield Schools as any we have seen in our long careers, honestly! Approving the levy increase signals a real vote of confidence from the community, parents (our "mover and shaker" parents were there in large numbers) and the Board of Education. Some board members stated that it was very important to have the positive support of the GEA in attendance."*

*Special thanks to four of our Greenfield resident members that chose to speak in favor of the increased tax levy. You all really made a difference tonight! Also, thanks to the GEA Representative Council for demonstrating the leadership to have us go ahead with this effort. We continue to be inspired by what we can accomplish if we all work as a united front."*

## Did the Federal Stimulus Package Save Your Job?

Many Americans confuse the "stimulus" package passed by Congress and the President last spring with the "bailout" for banks and other financial institutions passed the previous fall. However, unlike the bank bailout, the stimulus package (officially the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) was an emergency infusion of funds designed to directly save and create jobs for regular Americans.

Faced with an economic meltdown that resulted in the loss of an estimated \$15 trillion in America's combined wealth and five percent of all American jobs, the federal government quickly infused money into the economy through the stimulus package. Among the quickest, most effective means of doing this was approximately \$144 billion in aid to state and local governments. According to a recent study by the Economic Policy Institute this aid alone saved between 360,000 and 500,000 jobs nationwide. Many of these jobs are in school districts which depend mostly on state aid and also received direct federal monies through the IDEA, Title I, and other programs.

We feel confident in stating that in many of our districts, dozens of teachers and other staff would have been laid off without the infusion of cash that came from the federal government through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

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Council #10 Website  
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### MAKE CONNECTIONS

NEA Midwest Leadership  
Academy, Minneapolis,  
January 22-24.

WEAC Winter  
Conference, Madison,  
February 26-27

Council #10 Emerging  
Voices, Kohler, WI,  
March 26-28

Great  
Schools



[weac.org](http://weac.org)

## Health Insurance Reform Moves Forward

Many members attended Council #10 health insurance reform presentations this fall and learned about the urgent need to end health care hyperinflation and provide affordable health insurance for all Americans.

At the time of writing, health insurance reform legislation has cleared two major hurdles to passage and continues to advance in Congress. On November 7, the House of Representatives passed HR 3962. This is the first time in our nation's history that a house of Congress has passed comprehensive health insurance reform legislation. On November 21, the Senate achieved the 60 votes necessary to begin debate on the Senate's version of the reform legislation. Many details of the Senate bill are likely to change by the time it actually passes and moves forward to reconciliation with the House bill.

The House version of health insurance reform is supported by the NEA, the American Medical Association, the AARP and many health professional organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics. Among the highlights of the House bill are:

- Extends coverage to 35 to 37 million people
- Allows people with quality coverage through their employers to keep it
- Does not increase the deficit (according to the Congressional Budget Office)
- Does not tax employer provided health benefits, but creates a surtax on households with greater than \$1 million in annual income
- For those currently without affordable insurance, includes a public health insurance plan option, offered alongside private plans
- Immediately reduces the cost of post retirement health insurance through a \$10 billion reinsurance program
- Immediately begins to close the Medicare Part D "donut hole"
- Implements multiple measures to control health insurance costs such as ending insurance industry abuses, ending cost shifting to pay for care for the uninsured, and creating incentives for prevention, wellness and the most cost effective treatments

Unfortunately, the current Senate bill is weaker than the House version and still includes a 40% excise tax on the value of single plans exceeding \$8,500 and family plans exceeding \$23,000. Therefore, it is imperative that we contact our U.S. Senators by visiting: <http://capwiz.com/nea/issues/alert/?alertid=14119856>. Tell them:

- The 46 million uninsured people in the U.S., including 8 million children, need Quality, Affordable Health Care Coverage.
- To Fix the Tax on High Cost Health Plans included in the Senate's bill by supporting the House's methods of paying for reform.
- To Oppose any Cap or Limit of the Employee Tax Exclusion for Health Benefits.
- To control costs and provide choice, Include a Public Health Insurance Plan Option, available on day one.

## Take Action on the Mayoral Takeover Proposal

This October, Governor Doyle announced legislation that would lead to mayoral takeover of Milwaukee Public Schools. For a variety of reasons, our fellow members at the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA) and WEAC strongly oppose such legislation. The rationale for opposing this legislation is best summed up by school funding expert Jack Norman when he wrote:

*"Doyle's plan would remove all power from the elected MPS school board and give the mayor of Milwaukee the power to appoint a superintendent, assign principals, negotiate labor contracts, determine curriculum and oversee finance...There is nothing in the Doyle proposal that even hints at an awareness of the funding crisis affecting all public schools. Instead, the plan is based on the belief that the quality of education in Milwaukee can be dramatically improved simply by a new superintendent with strong business/CEO credentials, optimistic rhetoric and draconian union bargaining...No one denies that MPS is a district in crisis. But what supporters of MPS know is that there are many reforms already underway in the district; that true quality education must involve state financial reform; and that rhetoric and 'strong leadership' are essential but can't overcome the lack of money."*

As an alternative to mayoral takeover, the MTEA and WEAC have offered the Milwaukee Opportunity Plan. The Plan involves "Opportunity Centers" or schools where reform ideas can be created and modeled in order for other schools to duplicate. Some examples would include lengthening the school day and/or school year; integrating human services into school buildings; and dropout intervention at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level. As the strategies prove effective, they can be implemented in other schools in need of improvement. Additionally, on November 16, Representative Tamara Grigsby and Senator Spencer Coggs proposed an alternative to mayoral takeover of MPS. The plan has many similarities with the Milwaukee Opportunity Plan and is supported by WEAC.

Council #10 urges all members to Cyberlobby in support of the Grigsby/Coggs alternative to the mayoral takeover by visiting [http://www.weac.org/Issues\\_Advocacy/Cyberlobby.aspx](http://www.weac.org/Issues_Advocacy/Cyberlobby.aspx).