

Council #10



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Why We Need Health Care Reform This Year

This summer's often raucous argument over health care reform has left Americans dazed and confused. Many are asking, is the framework for health care reform proposed by President Obama and working its way through Congress a good idea?

So far, the answer from the NEA and WEAC is an emphatic "Yes!" The reason? Leaders from both political parties agree that the current health care system is completely unsustainable. The principal version of the reform in Congress is a good plan that will help address the problem.

If costs continue to rise at their current rate they will soon exceed starting salaries for teachers and create a situation where current levels of early retirement benefits (which are largely in the form of insurance) become too expensive to maintain.

Custodians, food service, clericals and teaching assistants have health care costs already exceeding starting and top salaries. Consequently, they are seeing increased numbers of part-time new hires that are ineligible for insurance.

Eventually, both our remaining full-time ESP members and teachers will be surrounded by internal comparables (those most favored by arbitrators) that consist of uninsured employees. These facts will be used by employers to further diminish your benefits and take them away through interest arbitration.

Health care reform as proposed by Obama holds the promise of creating just the opposite dynamic. Discriminatory practices used by insurance companies to deny coverage will be eliminated. More people will receive better health care coverage. Rather than being the target of the growing legions without insurance, we become the model for the insured.

Health care reform will also cut costs. Currently, your premiums are inflated by more than \$1,000 per year to cover the costs of the uninsured who cannot pay for much of the care they receive. Universal or broader coverage will lower our health care rates by emphasizing prevention and early detection of treatable conditions, freeing money that can be used for other important priorities.

Lower health care costs will strengthen the balance sheets of both private and public sector employers and will diminish the pressure to curtail our early retirement benefits.

What can you do? Call your congressperson and senators and let them know you support health care reform that:

- Makes health insurance truly affordable for everyone
- Eliminates insurance company discriminatory practices
- Lowers costs through a strong public option that competes with private insurers
- Finances reform by taxing those making more than \$300,000 per year
- Allows those who like their plans to keep them

Call Senators Kohl and Feingold toll free at 1-877-702-0976. Take action now!

For more facts, visit www.weac.org/healthcare. Be sure to login as a WEAC member.

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Council #10 Website
www.weac.org/council10

MAKE CONNECTIONS

Fall Bargaining Workshop,
Saturday, October 3, 10am-
4pm, Brookfield Sheraton, 375
S. Mooreland Rd.

Initial Educator Workshop,
"Overview of PI 34 & the PDP
Process", **Thursday, Oct 1** and
Monday, Oct 19, 4:30pm,
Regional Office, Brookfield.

WEAC Convention in Milwaukee
October 29 and 30



Should the Mayor Take Over Milwaukee Schools?

Have you wondered where our union stands on this summer's biggest education story? The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA), the local representing our fellow educators at the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), has come out strongly opposed to mayoral takeover. The reason is that mayoral take over is based on a faulty premise and will do literally nothing to address the real problems experienced by a large urban school system with high concentrations of joblessness, crime and poverty.

The non-stop drum beat that MPS is a "failing" school district is based on the premise that the district's administration and staff are incompetent and wasteful. Mayoral control will supposedly shake things up and bring order and accountability to the system. **People who actually work and teach at MPS know better.** The truth is, every large urban school district in the country is "failing" if we compare their test scores with those of their wealthier suburban neighbors. Ask yourself this, do you think that MPS would be doing much better by this standard if your district's own administration and staff were transplanted into Milwaukee?

Real solutions to Milwaukee's education problems are harder than simply handing over power to a mayoral savior. Constructive solutions would address overcrowded classrooms, inadequate supplies and technology, reduced options for elective courses, a lack of certified teachers and the continual loss of support professionals. Actual solutions would include reforming our state's broken system for funding schools which leaves most of our districts without the resources they need. Visionary solutions would recognize the connection between family sustaining jobs and the educational success of our students. Most of all, effective solutions would not be top down, but would engage the community and involve the educators who experience the problems most closely and will ultimately be called upon to implement any reforms.

Big Victory for Support Staff

This summer the Wisconsin State Legislature passed a WEAC supported provision treating education support professionals (ESP) the same as teachers under the Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS). The provision defines full-time employment based on a school year (1,320 hours) rather than a calendar year (1,904 hours) for the purpose of early retirement calculations. Many of our members worked hard to circulate post cards that helped persuade legislators to finally do the right thing. For more details visit the WEAC website at www.weac.org.

What Does Elimination of the QEO Mean for Us?

The newly adopted state budget repealed the Qualified Economic Offer (QEO) Law that effectively tipped the scales of bargaining power to the school districts for the past 16 years. The elimination of the QEO certainly does not guarantee teachers better contracts than they received over the last decade, but it does provide a level playing field for both the union and the district to bargain a fair contract ultimately based on actual district financial data and neighboring district comparables. WEAC's collective bargaining department will be conducting a workshop on how to effectively bargain under the new laws on **Saturday October 3 at the Sheraton in Brookfield**. If you are interested in attending please contact your chief negotiator or the regional UniServ office at (262) 789-6000.

WEAC and UW Partner to Promote Outstanding Students

WEAC has formed a new partnership with University of Wisconsin-Madison athletics to promote outstanding students across the state. The program is called "WEAC Kickoff Kids." WEAC invites families, teachers and school staff from across the state to tell us why your student stands out in your community and your school and should be the WEAC Kickoff Kid for September 19, October 17, October 31, or November 14 games. Go to the WEAC Web site at www.weac.org and complete the form to nominate a student from your school or family. For more information, email or call WEAC Media Relations Specialist Anne Egan-Waukau at waukau@weac.org or 800-354-7816, extension 1109.