

THE FLORIDA ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS, INC.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*Quarterly Executive Board Meeting
September 17, 2009*



TONY FRANSETTA, PRESIDENT

FLARA's Health Care Reform Meeting - By Pat Emmert, Pres., Palm Bch Treasure Coast AFL-CIO

FLARA HEALTH CARE REFORM MEETING

AUGUST 20, 2009

I doubt that we will ever have another annual FLARA health care meeting like the one today. There was not an empty seat. There also was not an empty parking space. I got there at 12:30. The police had the driveways blocked off. Had to park down the street in Morikami Park. Walked far back to the event.

When I got to the Civic Center, I was holding 20 tickets for union members, but there were no empty seats. I think maybe too many tickets were given out. The deputies weren't going to let me enter, but I mentioned their Colonel's name, and they permitted some of our union guys to put a "STAFF" tag around my neck. I gave the tickets I had to Bill Sauers, who was Sergeant At Arms. I did run into the Colonel at the end of the meeting and thanked him. Senator Nelson's aide, Michelle, directed me to a Reserved seat. Senators Aronberg and Deutch were sitting on the front row. When Aronberg left, I grabbed his seat, and spent the rest of the time with Senator Deutch, who was, I think, happy to see me.

Prior to the Congressmen speaking, we had the national President of ARA and former CWA officer speak. She was phenomenal. If you haven't heard Congressman Alcee Hastings (D.23) speak, you need to. He is awesome. He supports single payer health care and is a co-sponsor of HR676, as is Congressman Wexler. They were both great and had several standing ovations. Congressman Hastings said that the Chairman of the Palm Beach County Republican Party had made a public statement that he (Hastings) was not meeting with his constituents. He read a letter that he had addressed to Mr. Dinerstein, and had sent him a copy of his very heavy schedule, and suggested that Dinerstein set something up, and he would be happy to come and speak. He had received no response to that request. He brought his property tax bill with him and a payroll stub to show that as a Congressman, he pays \$400 plus dollars a month for his health care.

All questions had to be written on cards. Some of the tea partyers had gotten in, and both Congressmen handled their ridiculous questions with aplomb. Tony would not allow the questions to be screened, so they can never say that their questions were not addressed. One of the questions was so asinine. Congressman Wexler is like a rock star in his district, which is largely composed of retirees, who are on Medicare and very obviously support health care reform. The question to Wexler was, "Why do you support this health care bill when the majority of the people in your district oppose it?" Wexler got a big smile on his face and the rest of the people in the room started laughing. Tony said, "Obviously, that is not a true
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statement." That had to be an out of state person who had no knowledge of Wexler's district. I would estimate that between the protesters outside, security staff inside and attendees, we had 1,000 union members out there today. The ones doing the walking outside in the heat were the younger guys.

Unions that I saw represented: Teamsters Local 769 (Mike Scott, Josh Zivalich and John Sherman); Ironworkers Local 402 (5 members); American Postal Workers Union (Wayne

Parker, President and some of his members); IATSE Local 500; IBEW Local 728 (both Broward and Palm Beach members); PBA; SEIU (Lisa Tilson); International Union of Operating Engineers (Gary Waters and John Mullen and members); Office & Professional Employees; retired UAW. There were teachers from different unions. Marna Davidson with the Retired Teachers Chapter is on the FLARA Board. I am certain that I have missed some unions.

Overall, the crowd inside was very well behaved. Outside, it was obvious that the tea partyers were not accustomed to having the other side protesting. They complained because there was a band playing; said that was to stifle them. It was very hot. I heard that there were a few heat stroke victims. Inside, there was no screaming at all. After the meeting was over, there was a young man in the back of the room trying to scream over the crowd noise at Wexler. I nodded my head to the deputy and pointed to the fellow. When he saw the deputy look at him, he shut up and left with everyone else.

When I was walking the mile back to my car, there were three or four protesters on the corner. One of them was complaining that they had not been allowed to be heard, never mind that they were trying to crash an organization's function. No one was paying any attention to him, then he said, "This is the fault of the unions. The unions are going to die." Before I gave it a second thought that I was walking alone, I said to him, "Don't you worry about the unions, Mister." He looked around. I had on a shirt that had the AFL-CIO logo on the left side. He read my shirt, and then he said, "I didn't say anything." By that point, I had realized that I was all by myself, and that I should just continue on to my car.

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I commend Tony Fransetta, Deborah Dion and all the others who put this together. All of the major networks were there, as well as AlJazerra and CNN. The meeting was streamed live to WPTV Channel 5 (NBC).

Submitted by:

Pat Emmert, President

Palm Beach-Treasure Coast AFL-CIO (CLC)

Locals react to Obama's health care reform speech



Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Thursday, September 10, 2009

"My fear is that health insurance companies will be in control of all of this. We need to be in control of them."

- *Bob Bloom, owner of Ink & Toner USA in suburban West Palm Beach*

"One thing the president didn't give enough detail on is how do you control utilization. Utilization drives expenses."

- *Jonathan Satter, chairman of the board of the Palm Beach County Health Care District; principal and co-founder of W.G. Compass Realty*

"It's not about health care, it's about the election in three-plus years and taking this president down in three-plus years. It's so sad that politics are more important than coming together and mutually trying to get credit like they used to do when I was younger."

- *Tony Fransetta, president Florida Alliance for Retired Americans, a group affiliated with the AFL-CIO*

"It needs to come to come to a head. . . . Why can't we take all of the good stuff that's going and put it in the pot. Eighty percent of all of these issues we all agree on. Let's just start with that."

- *Carol Ryan, she and her husband own A-1 American Electric in Palm Beach Gardens*

"To provide people with an option is very important. . . . The number of people we see continues to grow as the economy has its trouble and people lose their jobs. There are people who are educated who have college degrees who are now facing no insurance for the first time in their lives, and really don't know how to navigate through the public health care system."

- *Robert Glass, executive director of the free Community Health Center of West Palm Beach*

"I don't see how if (the public option) is not subsidized, how they're going to pay for it. Once again the idea is for everyone who can't purchase insurance elsewhere to go toward this public option. Well, who's that going to be? That's going to be your high-risk individuals. I'd love to see it work; I don't see how it can."

Thousands throng amid chants, signs and marching band as Wexler, Hastings speak at health care forum in suburban Delray Beach

By [MITRA MALEK](#) and [PAUL QUINLAN](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writers

Thursday, August 20, 2009

Thousands of activists for and against President Obama's health-care proposals are massing in suburban Delray Beach for a forum with Democratic U.S. Reps. Robert Wexler and Alcee Hastings.

As of noon, Palm Beach County sheriff's deputies estimated that nearly 2,000 people had shown up outside the South County Civic Center, which has a capacity of 500 people. Deputies were bracing for the crowd to swell to as many as 5,000 people.

About 70 deputies began setting up around 7:30 a.m. for the meeting, which began at 1 p.m.

"And of course you've got every news agency in the world," said sheriff's Lt. Shane Cioffi. "I was actually interviewed by Al Jazeera."

Chants of "Yes we will!" outside the civic center competed with a man on a megaphone shouting, "No ObamaCare!"

"SOCIALIZED MEDICINE: A PRESCRIPTION FOR DISASTER," reads one hand-lettered sign across from the entrance of the civic center, where the parking lot was jammed full by 11:30 p.m.

Another sign, printed, says in red and blue letters: "HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICA NOW!"

Other signs along the center's circular driveway express support for Israel and opposition to terrorism.

Meanwhile, a high school marching band from Pompano Beach was performing arrangements of songs including the Michael Jackson hits *Beat It* and *Thriller*, as well as Stevie Wonder's *Isn't She Lovely*. The band was recruited by Hastings' staff to support the pro-reform activists, chief of staff Art Kennedy said. "We knew the anti-health care group would be here, so we wanted some way to counter them," Kennedy said.

Nearby, critics of the Democrats' proposals held up a sign reading: "THEY BUSSED IN THE BAND TO SILENCE OUR VOICES!"

Liberal and conservative groups nationwide have urged activists to attend the forum, sponsored by the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans. The alliance, concerned that the meeting would draw an overflow crowd to the 500-seat civic center, was giving its members preference for free tickets for the event. That enraged some conservative critics of Obama, who said they would express their displeasure in the parking lot.

One such group, the South Florida Tea Party, was also planning a mass burning of AARP membership cards. AARP, which has angered conservative groups by endorsing health care reform, drew similar protests from liberal groups six years ago after endorsing President Bush's Medicare prescription-drug plan.

Earlier this week, roughly 800 people flocked to Stuart for a health care town hall meeting Tuesday evening hosted by U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, R-Tequesta. Only about 300 could fit inside the Johnson Auditorium at Indian River State College, while outside, one man was arrested for spitting on another, then keying a minivan as deputies chased him.

On Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Ron Klein, D-Boca Raton, briefly addressed health care at a community meeting in suburban Boynton Beach, disappointing activists on both sides who had hoped for a more extensive debate. Klein is planning to hold a town hall meeting Aug. 26, but only by telephone.

Florida Health Care Reform Advocates Ratcheting Up the Pressure on Elected Democrats

By Jerry Waxman

as submitted to the Huffington Post

“Shame on us!” admonished Monica Russo to the assembled 1100 participants at the Floridians Rally for Healthcare reform, “Shame on us!” She used the phrase several times to accent what people were not doing hard enough to influence their elected representatives to pass meaningful healthcare reform. It was more like preaching to the choir and yet her stinging rebuke was a warning that healthcare reform could fail without the extraordinary efforts of all the assembled and their activism in promoting the legislation to their friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

The event, sponsored by Health Care Reform for America Now with participation from OFA, SEIU, AFL-CIO, AFSCME and FCAN was held Saturday afternoon, August 29 at 2:00 PM at the Orlando Downtown Recreation Complex to a capacity crowd. This was not an open event; a ticket was needed to enter and participate. Outside, there were a few vendors and petitioners for candidates for office and Florida Redistricting, and even some protesters, however, nothing got confrontational or out of hand. Buses had brought people in from Miami, West Palm Beach, Jacksonville, Tallahassee and other cities throughout the state.

Russo, a member of the AFSCME Health Care Team, also acted as emcee and started the afternoon with a fitting tribute to the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy, specifically citing his continuing efforts to assure that every American had access to a quality education and quality health care. After a moment of silence, State Senator Dan Gelber led the Pledge of Allegiance and told the crowd that at the moment there are 800,000 children in the state of Florida who are uninsured, and that something needed to be done about it. State Representative Scott Randolph Welcomed everyone to the event which is in his district (36).

A short health story was told by Matthew Le Clair, 23 regarding his physical condition. Two years ago at the age of 21 Le Clair had experienced severe back pains but had no insurance and none offered by his employer so he didn't seek treatment until the pain was too unbearable. After a \$3000.00 MRI and minimal treatment he was diagnosed as having three herniated discs. Unable to perform the physical tasks, he was fired by his employer due to illness.

The three person keynote panel included Democratic Congressman Alan Grayson, Mary Kay Henry, Executive Vice President of SEIU and Tony Fransetta, President of the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans. Grayson explained that the current bill in the House of Representatives stops insurance companies from lifetime capping of claims and also stops them from excluding people with preexisting conditions. Grayson reminded everyone that 18000 people die each year because they do not seek medical attention due to lack of insurance coverage.

Fransetta, whose organization has over 200,000 members in Florida, railed against the “wimpy Democrats” and went through a check list of myths that needed to be debunked, including Medicare benefits being cut. What he did say is that Medicare will be reformed so that providers will be more accountable to the taxpayers.

Ms. Henry hosted a question and answer session in which the panelists answered questions from participants who wrote them down on white 3x5 cards. The questions seemed too well thought out and studied to have been spontaneous, but they produced some interesting responses. Scott Randolph advised at one point during his answer that there was talk in Republican legislative circles that during the next session they would sponsor a bill exempting Florida from any healthcare reform bill that Congress passes. He urged everyone to write their legislators in opposition to the proposals. There was a question about small businesses being overly burdened by this legislation. Grayson told the questioner that any small business with a payroll under \$250,000.00 would be exempt and that her business payroll was small enough that she didn't have to worry. He also added that during the Bush years insurance company rates tripled and their profits rose 800% placing much more of a burden on the small business owner. The highlight of the Q & A came with Fransetta's rousing response to a question about Socialized Medicine in which he claimed it already exists “and you will never see any Republican denounce it!” He was speaking about VA healthcare, a system which he as a disabled Korean War veteran was completely familiar with. He warned all not to be fooled or intimidated by any claims of Socialized Medicine.

After the Q & A, Miriam Silvermintz of West Palm Beach explained why she has become an activist. Her son, now 20, is diabetic and at the moment is covered under her insurance, but shortly he will need his own coverage and will not be able to get it due to his preexisting condition. She held a meeting at her house and recruited several friends to become active. I interviewed her afterward and she intimated that her group must have touched some kind of nerve because she was invited to participate in Charlie Crist's' [2008 State of the State Address](#) where he mentioned her family by name, although nothing ever came of it.

The stage was now set for Monica Russo:

“Stand up if you've made a call, stand up if you've knocked on doors, stand up if you've written a letter to the editor, stand up if you've organized a house meeting.” Each question elicits a response from less than half of the attendees, whereupon she scolds them with “Shame on us!”

Russo outlined her plan of action:

1. Wear the blue ribbon provided in your health care package until legislation is passed
2. Get together September 2 and organize for action
3. 3. 10000 calls to Senator Bill Nelson's office in Washington on September 9 202.224.5274, in Orlando toll-free 888.671.4091 (let's face it- we pay his salary, he can afford the call.)

Russo then went on to say that senators like Bill Nelson and representatives like Suzanne Kosmas need to realize that they can't just automatically take for granted the

votes of Democrats if they don't do what the people want. The Florida labor unions are beginning to realize this and so is the average Democratic voter in Florida. If they are going to seek reelection they are going to have to earn those votes, and it's possible that they could lose in the primaries if they don't take action now. It's time to throw down the gauntlet.

Press coverage for this event didn't generate much activity, although there was an article in the [Orlando Sentinel](#) describing the event. WFTV Channel 9 did cover the event and conducted [some interviews](#) with participants. Jamie Foxx performing at the nearby Bob Carr Performing Arts Center got more press coverage.

Crowds expected at Delray Beach town hall on healthcare reform

BY BETH REINHARD

outside the closed doors. Deluged with calls for weeks, the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans (FLARA) turned its annual public forum in Delray Beach into a ticketed event. That means the 500 seats will be mostly filled by members of the liberal, union-affiliated group that favors a healthcare overhaul. Organizers are requiring questions in writing, hoping to avoid the screaming matches that have disrupted town halls across the country as Congress contemplates sweeping reforms.

But outside the South County Civic Center, protesters are planning a show of force. Yelling and screaming will be encouraged. Hostile signs will be waved. A group called the South Florida Tea Party plans to burn AARP cards in a rebellion against the retiree group that wants Congress to act. "They're trying to create chaos, and I don't think that serves anyone well," said FLARA president Tony Fransetta, who is expecting CNN and other national media. Several members of Congress representing Broward and Palm Beach counties were invited to Thursday's town hall, but only Democrats Alcee Hastings of Miramar and Robert Wexler of Boca Raton agreed to come. Other Florida Democrats, including Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Weston and Ron Klein of Boca Raton, are scheduling telephone town halls on healthcare that will keep their constituents at a distance.

The Palm Beach County Republican Party is calling Thursday's forum a "sham" because FLARA turned down hundreds of ticket requests. The result: a political call-to-arms race, with groups on both sides of the debate urging their members to show up -- even if they have to stand outside -- for fear they would be outnumbered by their opponents. "We must seize this opportunity even if the representative is not in your district," cried one e-mail pressing GOP activists to show up. On the other side of the political spectrum, AFL-CIO members have been mobilized to make sure "our retirees are SAFE, SECURE and are able to attend this event, just like they have in the past without FEAR, INTIMIDATION and not SUBJECTED TO UNRULY behavior," read one e-mail. An arm of the Democratic national party is calling for "making sure the most powerful voices in this debate are those calling for real reform." Fransetta said about 15 sheriff's deputies will be standing by.

Support for the Democratic administration and its healthcare agenda is eroding in Florida, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released Thursday. Less than half of the voters, 47 percent, approve of President Barack Obama -- down from 58 percent in June. Most Floridians oppose enacting healthcare reform if it will "significantly" increase the federal

deficit. ``At least in Florida, the protests against the proposed healthcare overhaul that have been surfacing at town meetings held by members of Congress have struck a chord with the public," Quinnipiac pollster Peter Brown said in a news release. ``Voters approve of the demonstrations and they overwhelmingly disagree with the view expressed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that these protests are `un-American,' ``

Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid wrote in a recent newspaper column, ``Drowning out opposing views is simply un-American."

The rally in Delray Beach starts at noon, and the meeting is scheduled from 1 to 3 p.m.

RESOLUTION ON THE PUBLIC PLAN COMPONENT OF NATIONAL HEALTH CARE REFORM, MAKING MEDICARE AVAILABLE TO ALL

Florida Alliance for Retired Floridians

Given that Congress is now considering including a public health insurance plan as part of national health care reform legislation, it is important the public plan be as economical and efficient as possible. Health care costs are increasing at an unsustainable rate and are constraining economic recovery.

Creating a new public plan that would provide essentially the same health care services as Medicare does would waste tax dollars because a new administrative and reimbursement structure would have to be created for the new “public option” program.

A better approach is to expand the Medicare program, rather than create a new program. The Medicare program enjoys broad public support, is available everywhere, has low administrative costs, and is an example of a very successful “government health care program.”

Be is resolved that we call upon our congressional delegation to advocate for including in health care reform legislation an expansion of the Medicare program as the “public option.”

- Employers and the public should be able to “buy into” Medicare as an alternative to purchasing private health insurance.**
- The Medicare Payment Advisory commission should be specifically charged with developing provider reimbursement methods that strengthen reimbursement for necessary and beneficial medical procedures.**
- The Medicare program should be substantially strengthened, particularly to promote preventive health practices and to prevent, detect and prosecute fraud.**

Tony Fransetta, Richard Polangin, Florida Alliance for Retired Americans