

Hunger Action Network of New York State

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August 2009 Hunger Alert

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1. Hunger Action Network Annual Membership Conference. Mon. Sept. 21

Hunger Action's Annual membership meeting will be in Albany on Monday, September 21st from 9:30 AM to 4 PM. We hope to do it at the same church where we have been doing our lobby day the last couple of years, about a block from the Capitol.

We will be organizing a van or bus from NYC.

The general theme of the meeting is “A Healthy Future: Healthy Schools, Economy, Work, Food, and Healthcare”. Potential panels include: Best Nutritional Practices at EFPs; Building the Faith and Hunger Network; Reauthorization of the Federal child Nutrition Program; Public Health Option vs. Single Payer; Responding to the Economic Recession; and Affording Housing Panel

The annual membership meeting is when we elect members to our Board of Directors. Please let us know if you are interested in being a candidate. We can send you background info. Contact dcatuzzi@hungeractionnys.org or 518 434-7371 xt 3#

2. Talk to your Congressman during August about making health care a human right

Congress has adjourned for August without taking a vote on universal health care. We are disappointed in what Congress is doing so far. Rather than focusing on treating health care as a human right, their prime focus is mandating that everyone has to purchase private health insurance if they don't get it from the government or their employer. Insurance company revenues will be greatly increased and they will still control access to health care. Insurance will continue largely to be employment-based. We will spend more on health care than we do now, yet tens of millions of Americans will remain insured. And while we don't think a public option is a good solution, the public option now being discussed is very weak and very small.

For two decades Hunger Action has supported a Medicare for All type program (HR 676), where one program pays all bills but you get to choose whom you receive medical services from. By eliminating the waste and profits of private health insurance, we could save \$400 billion annually, which would help pay to provide care to the 50 million Americans who are presently uninsured. But so far Congressional Democrats are putting the interests of insurance companies ahead of the need to treat health care as a human rights.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has agreed that the full House will vote on an amendment by Cong. Weiner (NY – 9 CD) to substitute single payer for the present house health care bill. We need to call, write and talk to our local Congress members when they are home in August.

More than 50 faith leaders have signed a letter to Congress urging them to treat health care as a human right. A copy of the letter from the Faith and Hunger Network can be viewed at www.singlepayernewyork.org

3. Single Payer will Save NY State \$20 Billion Annually by 2019

The long delayed state study on universal health care was finally released a few weeks ago – late on a Friday afternoon, the traditional time to bury a news story. The report concluded that a single payer was the most cost-effective way to provide health care to all New Yorkers – much better than the incremental approach favored by the Governor’s health advisors. Single payer in fact would reduce health spending \$20 billion annually below projected levels within ten years. See our website www.hungeractionnys.org for more info, including a link to the full report.

The report failed however to make any recommendations. Governor Paterson has been a long time supporter of single payer. We hope he will propose a state single payer plan once Congress fails to enact a true universal health care plan.

4. Counties / NYC can access tens of millions of dollars for transitional jobs for welfare participants

This year’s state budget included \$14 million for wage subsidies for welfare participants; \$7 million for both transitional jobs and green jobs; and \$5 million for health care jobs. Another \$10 million was given to the Career Pathways programs.

These programs were eligible for a 4 to 1 match under the federal economic stimulus package. OTDA decided to ask for an additional \$20 million for the transitional jobs programs, but decided to wait on asking for a federal match for green and health care jobs to see what the demand for the programs are. All counties and NYC will receive funds for the transitional jobs. Local districts can apply for green jobs funding to OTDA. The largest 8 districts receive health care jobs funding.

Advocates should meet with HRA and the local districts to discuss how they plan to spend these job dollars. Copies of the memos to the districts are at <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/directives/2009/#lcm>.

Wage subsidies will be up to 35 hours a week. The transitional jobs require a wage of at least \$8 an hour; the others just require the legal minimum wage. Transitional jobs include at least 7 hours in paid training and education. The subsidized slots are for up to 12 months, though they expect many will be less.

5. Senate Fails to Vote on Green Jobs Proposal; Vote Later this year possible

The proposal to create up to 30,000 new jobs by energy retrofitting (e.g., weatherizing) up to one million new homes passed the State Assembly and almost passed the State Senate. Unfortunately, it was laid aside during the last few hours of the chaotic close of session by the Senate, which has been stalled for a month after the failed coup attempt. There were actually enough votes to pass the bill since a number of Senate Republicans also support, but unfortunately too many Senate Democrats failed to show up for the last day. This bill hopefully will come up again in the fall.

6. Hamilton Hill Food Processing Kitchen is Cooking

The Hamilton Hill Food Processing kitchen is up and running in our permanent site in Schenectady. We have three summer youth volunteers working with us. Danny Brinson has been hired as our youth coordinator. Our next challenge is to expand our sales, with more focus on farmers' markets, direct sales and local churches / faith groups. You can check out our products and order online at www.healthycommunityharvest.com or through the HANNYS website.

7. State Faces Multi-Billion Deficit; Cuts Possible

New York State is facing a \$2.1 billion deficit for the current fiscal year and a September special session of the state legislature is possible to deal with the gap. Advocacy groups want the state to tap into more than a billion dollars that are in two "rainy day funds" for such a situation. The Governor is likely to propose spending cuts. Some advocates hope that he will push his earlier proposal for a soda, anti-obesity tax to raise \$400 million. A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that obesity raises annual national spending by \$147 billion. Hunger Action supports at least partially ending the rebate of \$9 billion from the anti-speculation stock transfer tax. The state actually collects a few cents tax on each transfer of stock but then gives the money back (the tax hasn't been formally repealed since it is legally dedicated to pay off some NYC-related bonds). The tax mainly hits speculators who buy and sell stocks all day long. Another idea is to help reduce global warming by imposing a carbon tax.