

The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
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African Americans and the African world.

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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

October 15, 2009 - Issue 346

[Home](#)

**Block Bad Healthcare Bills
Let's Try Democracy
By David Swanson
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

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So, the Democratic Party has achieved two of its primary goals for healthcare reform (I mean in addition to renaming this charade health INSURANCE reform). First, they've managed to get one Republican to vote for one of their bills. To their way of thinking, it's harder to blame Democrats for a lousy law if it's been supported by one Republican (Senator Olympia Snow this week in the Senate Finance Committee) and can therefore be labeled "bipartisan".

Second, although somewhat in logical conflict with the first achievement, they've managed to communicate the myth that Republicans in the Senate are preventing healthcare reform. To do this, they've kept in place the filibuster rule, which allows senators representing 11 percent of us to block all legislation. They've claimed that all Republicans intend to filibuster, although there's been no confirmation that they do. And at least one Democratic senator has secretly informed Majority Leader Reid that he or she will join in a filibuster, thus making plausible the claim that 41 filibusterers exist while keeping the bulk of the blame on the Republicans.

The worst and best news in this drawn-out drama comes from the other side of the hill, however. We must be put into the bad news column is the deal the so-called progressives in the House cut with the president at the start. They agreed to not mention single-payer and to treat a public-option as not only a useful step but as their ideal. Then anti-democratic astroturfing groups and labor unions followed their lead. This shifted the debate so far to the right that a public-option could no longer be the middle ground.

In the good news column, we should put the hard commitment that some House progressives have made to vote "No" on any bill that lacks a serious, immediate, national, and truly public public-option. And put in the same column the efforts that Congressmen Dennis Kucinich and Anthony Weiner are still advancing to do better by us and truly represent the demands of the majority of Americans.

If a healthcare bill comes before the House of Representatives, before or after a conference committee merges House and Senate bills, that amounts to a bailout for health insurance companies and lacks any token redeeming feature (a serious public option) that does more good than harm, and if the Republicans all vote against the bill because they would still prefer nothing at all, or because they would prefer to see even a bill they like fail (and call it Obama's bill), then we will only need 39 Democrats to vote No to block the bill. Twelve have publicly committed to voting No on a the progressive website FireDogLake.com and 57 have made the same commitment in a public letter posted on TalkingPointsMemo.com and discussed on AfterDowningStreet.org. These commitments are worded to avoid some ways of weaseling out of them, but not all. If the progressives cave, you can kiss any progressive influence on other legislation goodbye. If they stand strong and vote down a bad bill, you can expect a better bill in round two, as well as a chance at voting down other unpopular items, such as war funding.

Progressive Democrats of America and other principled activist groups are promoting two other items. A proposal from Congressman Weiner would replace the bills now under consideration with a plan for Medicare for All. This may not pass, and the Senate would still stand in the way if it did, but the more votes it can garner the better round two of the debate will be. The other proposal is Congressman Kucinich's amendment to allow states to create single-payer systems at the state level. That amendment already passed in a committee vote, but the House "leadership" could unceremoniously strip it out of the final bill, or the conference committee could do the same. House members who make a grand show of voting for Weiner's amendment may fail to fight for Kucinich's, especially if it is stripped out without being put to a floor vote.

If Kucinich's amendment survives, even in a horrendous bill that is signed into law, we may see single-payer healthcare created in a several states quite quickly. Canada created its national health system province by province. There's a bi-partisan single-payer bill working its way through the Pennsylvania legislature right now, and PDA is already working to help pass it. Join us (if you can) for the Healthcare4allPA Rally in the Harrisburg capital rotunda on October 20. California, Illinois, Massachusetts and Ohio are at work as well. California has already passed single-payer and had it vetoed twice. A new governor will change the outlook.

Meanwhile a coalition of groups at MobilizeForHealthcar.org is pushing the discussion in the right direction by exposing the brutal and murderous policies of health insurance companies. Over 700 people have committed to risking arrest in nonviolent protest.

Citizens and healthcare providers are participating in sit-ins at health insurance offices in nine cities across the country on Thursday, October 15, 2009 to call for real reform that addresses the real cause of the health care crisis, the insurance companies.

Thursday, October 15, 2009 – SCHEDULE OF SIT-INS

1) New York, NY, 10am EST, United HealthGroup / 1 Penn Plaza / 10119
Contact: Omar Kutty / omarkutty@hotmail.com / 773-576-2559

2) Washington, DC, 10am EST, Wellpoint / 655 15th St NW
Contact: Kevin Zeese / kzeese@earthlink.net / 301-996-6582

3) Palm Beach, FL, 11:30am EST, Humana / 2056 Vista Pkwy
Contact: Rick Ford / floridianshealth@aol.com / 561-601-9150

4) Boston, MA, 12:00p EST, Cigna Office / 2223 Washington St / 02462
Contact Ben Day / 617-723-7001 / director@masscare.org

5) Cleveland, OH, 10am Central, Medical Mutual / 2060 E 9th St / 44115
Contact: Drew Smith / drewsmith86@gmail.com / 330-703-0556

6) Portland, OR, 10am, Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield / 100 SW Market / 97201
Contact: Chris Lowe / 503-788-2543 (preferred) 503-913-3980 / clowe@igc.org

7) Phoenix, AZ, 4-6p, United Healthcare / 2390 E. Camelback Road Suite 300 / 85016
Contact: Dan O'Neal / 480-650-0746 / dan@pdamerica.org

8) Los Angeles, CA, 10am, Anthem Blue Cross / 801 S. Figueroa St. / 90017
Contact: Sam Pullen / samuelbpullen@hotmail.com / 760-275-7874

9) Reno, NV, 11am , United Healthcare 5190 Neil Road #420 / 89502
Contact: Lisa Stiller 775-232-2823 / 775-746-1313 / koffeenut@yahoo.com

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator, David Swanson, is co-founder of the AfterDowningStreet.org coalition and a board member of Progressive Democrats of America. He is the author of: [**Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union**](#) (Seven Stories Press). His website is www.davidswanson.org. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Swanson.



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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

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