

## Nurses' guide to single-payer reform

### Voices of concern for health care security: bridge the gap

By Rand Wilson

Forty-four million Americans currently lack insurance, and millions more are under-insured. In just the last four years, 4 million more Americans have lost their coverage. In the same time period, health care costs have risen nearly 50 percent and premiums have gone up more than three times faster than average wages.

These trends affect everyone, making health care one of the top political issues this year.

That's why over a thousand people from 85 labor and community organizations marched from Cambridge across the Longfellow Bridge to a rally in Boston last month calling on our elected officials to "Bridge the Gap" for quality, affordable health care for all.

The rally united the struggles of union members against health care cost shifting with the outrage that caregivers and community activists feel about cuts in essential health care services. Many advocates voiced their growing frustration over a failing health insurance system during the rally segment of the day's event following the march.

"I'm spending my retirement savings and my son's funds for college education on health care," said a recently widowed mother from Marshfield. "I'm faced with tough choices: do I pay the mortgage or pay

for our health insurance?"

"I'm tired of witnessing the needless suffering of so many patients who lack health insurance, adequate prescription drug coverage and access to preventive care," said Barbara Cooke, a surgical nurse and member of the MNA.

"Telephone workers went on strike for three months in 1989 to preserve our health care benefits," said John Horgan, a Verizon service tech and member of IBEW Local 2222. "Fifteen years later, we are still fighting employer attacks on our health benefits. This problem can't be solved at the bargaining table."

"Even though we provide health care, we can't afford it for our own families," said Alfred Sandaire, a nursing home worker and member of SEIU Local 2020. "We need a plan that covers all of us."

"Covering everyone in a universal plan would allow us to contain out-of-control costs and affordably 'bridge the gap' between those who have health insurance and those who don't," said Paul Cannon, president of Teamsters Local 122 and co-chair of Jobs with Justice's Health Care Action Committee. "The savings from eliminating insurance industry waste and red tape will keep it cost effective and improve the quality of care." ■



Scenes from the "Bridge the Gap" rally and march for health care from Cambridge to Boston.



## Mass. Senior Action Council honors O'Malley as 'health care champion'

By Katy Sperrazza

Peggy O'Malley—MNA Board member and dedicated supporter of the single-payer health care movement—was presented with the Massachusetts Senior Action Council's (MSAC) prestigious Health Care Champion Award. The award, which was presented during MSAC's annual dinner on May 7, was given to O'Malley in recognition of her dedication to and leadership on health care policy initiatives and related social/economic issues.

O'Malley has served as the chairperson of MASS-CARE, a coalition of more than 60 organizations working toward universal health care in Massachusetts; has led relentless efforts to save the Addison Gilbert Hospital from closure; and has advocated for the implementation of the MNA's proposed safe staffing legislation.

Most of O'Malley's 27-year career as a nurse was spent at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Early in her career, O'Malley realized that political decisions about health care finance were interfering with her ability to care for patients. She decided if she were to fulfill her legal and ethical obligations as a nurse, she would have to learn more about politics and the economics of healthcare. This knowledge led to her ongoing efforts to influence public policy and protect her patients. O'Malley attended the "Women in Politics" program at Boston College, and interned in the office of the Senate chair of the Health Care Committee in 1989, the year that "universal healthcare" was enacted in Massachusetts. O'Malley points out that 15 years later we are still waiting for healthcare for all.

In accepting her award, O'Malley spoke

to the hundreds of senior citizens as a registered nurse, an MNA representative, but first and foremost as a patient advocate. She was clear as she talked about her concerns, as a nurse, with the current health-care system but even more clear about the need for change. For many years, O'Malley has been an outstanding representative of all registered nurses, constantly challenging the system to provide better quality healthcare to all.



Peggy O'Malley

Massachusetts Senior Action Council was

founded in 1981 to promote the rights, well-being, and dignity of all people, particularly vulnerable senior citizens. It is a statewide, democratically run membership organization open to people of all ages. With more than 2,500 members, 50 affiliated groups and 10 active chapters across the state, Mass. Senior Action Council is respected as one of the most dynamic, effective grassroots groups in the country, one that happens to be led by elders.

Massachusetts Senior Action is leading organizing efforts for affordable prescription drugs for seniors, people with disabilities, and consumers of all ages. They are also at the forefront of organizing to defend Medicare and Social Security, improve affordable housing, expand community-based long term care and win a universal, single payer health care system. ■