

B Pearson's report on health care caucus at convention

The greatest excitement for me of the national LWV convention was to participate in the Health Care Caucus, coordinated by the League in MetroPhoenix, with participants from 8 states (MA, LA, CA, WA, VT, MI, NC, CO). Planning began in earnest among the 16 organizers in April and culminated with the caucus, early Sunday morning July 1, the last day of the convention. Working with the healthcare team gave me both the exhilarating feeling that our group is not alone, along with the depressing realization that 95% of the country is far behind us in progress toward Single Payer.

Michelle Dorsey, the leader of the caucus steering committee, a young physician from MetroPhoenix was inspiring. Our committee was a mix of veteran League members and newbies like me, so we had naïve enthusiasm and institutional knowledge. Together we tweaked the message for a proposed teeshirt, which we enjoyed wearing throughout the conference as a billboard for others and as plumage to find each other in the crowd. The logo design (link above) was well-received and we may get to contribute it to HealthcareNow as a logo for the national movement (!) We gave out DVDs (Fixit and Big Pharma), crafted a ½ page Call-to-Action flyer, stickers, bookmarks, pens—and raised a little money with the shirts and other efforts to afford swagbags with literature and snacks for the 7:30 am meeting time. We also used the bags successfully as incentives to fill out our follow-up survey (being tallied now).

The speaker for the Caucus was Claudia Fegan, a physician at Cook County Hospital and a national coordinator for PNHP. She was personal, emphatic, on-target (even “diverse”)—everything you want in a speaker. Her talk is on Youtube. Check it out.

As in her talk, there are a thousand good reasons for single payer, but HOW DO WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?! One of the early goals of the caucus was to try to elevate healthcare in League priorities at the national level, but we ended up concentrating on creating more awareness—our goal here at home. The League is, potentially, a great resource for Single Payer, but frankly, we're going backwards. Single Payer was first adopted by the League in 1993 and was addressed again formally from the floor of the convention in 2016, but it has slipped. With active voter suppression and looming losses in democratic process, to say nothing of the national lack of humanity at an unimaginable scale, the LWV-US feels urgent to focus on VOTING at the expense of other advocacy. On the national website, Healthcare is under “Other Issues,” but even there, the League is pulled in different directions by dire local conditions. So many states are struggling without even the Medicaid expansions. Other state initiatives, like us, have legislation filed that's not going anywhere. Vermont is a very ambiguous example. California and New York seem closest—closer than we are, but “no cigar.”

Luckily, there's a lot of talk about it. Lots of candidates in lots of states are “for” Single Payer. How do we take talk and make it policy?!

For the caucus, I'm now trying to nudge the post-conference follow-up that we talked about and volunteered for. It's a patchy network—but it's a network, and a great goal.

Gratefully,

Barbara Pearson, Amherst League, Amherst Area Hub of Western MA Medicare 4 All