

Protestors Stage Mock Funeral

Health Care Reform Supporters Stage Mock Funeral

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ROCKVILLE, Md. - Protestors in Rockville held a mock funeral on Tuesday, sending a message to health insurance companies that they're "sick of it."



It was part of a day of protest nationwide in support of health care reform, including rallies in Maryland and the District.

A chorus of cars and trucks honked with approval at the protesters. They stood along Gude Drive carrying signs that demanded "big insurance" stop denying health care and called for a public insurance option.

Down the street are the offices of United Health Care. Soon a hearse rounded the corner, to the cheers of protesters. The mock funeral procession made its way down to the insurer's building where the protesters removed a coffin and held a mock service for the thousands they say died from being uninsured or denied coverage.

"Marilyn died at age 63 of cancer," one woman said before playing a red carnation on top of the casket.

Christine Grewell told the crowd of about 70 people about her battle with the insurance industry. Her monthly premiums are more than her mortgage. Yet her policy only covered \$500 for medication a year. When her daughter was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, the insurance didn't cover the \$20,000 in medication her daughter needed.

"MS cripples young women. It runs in our family. It's horrible to think your insurance company would leave your children uncovered," Grewell said.

Her family would have gone bankrupt paying for the treatments, except that her daughter had enrolled in graduate school. The university's insurance did not consider the MS a pre-existing condition and covered her treatment.

One college student at the rally says he was inspired to come after attending President Obama's speech at the University of Maryland. He has insurance but believes everyone should have access to affordable care.

"There's a lot of misinformation out there so when I saw the president speak I saw him standing up to them and I just wanted to back him up," Ahmed Nasri said.

A United Health Care spokesperson listened to the protestors speak. She says United Health Care also supports reform and has proposed ways to save billions of dollars.

"We want health reform. We are actively working with Congress to find the right way to bring reform so everyone can have health insurance," Debora Spano, with United Health Group said.

In a written statement from the company's Minneapolis, Minnesota headquarters, the company said it supports doing away with limits on pre-existing conditions, guaranteed coverage, and ending rates based on health status and gender.

In D.C. another group rallied outside America's Health Insurance Plans, the trade organization for the health care insurers. The nationwide protests are organized by moveon.org. The group says it has 99 protests scheduled across the country today, targeting the largest health insurers.

"We have to remember what's at stake here is human lives," Mark Anderson told the crowd of about 70 in the District. His father was denied coverage after getting an infection that shut down his kidneys and nearly killed him. He finally got

insurance for his pre-existing condition when he got old enough to qualify for Medicare.

In a statement America's Health Insurance Plans says it supports "bipartisan health care reform that covers every American, improves quality and makes health care coverage more affordable."

But with skyrocketing premiums, Anne Kasper, says the insurance companies are failing. Her husband is a doctor and provided insurance for his practice. Kasper says they paid as much as \$38,000 to insure just four people through United Health Care. When she wanted her doctor in Maryland to perform a routine surgery, she says the company refused to pay and instead wanted her to go to another doctor in the company's network in another state.

"If we knew they weren't going to do the job we wouldn't pay for them and we'd find someone else to do the job like a public option that's run by the government," Kasper said.

Right now, Kasper and the other protestors claim health insurers aren't living up to their responsibility.

Robert Zirkelbach, spokesman for America's Health Insurance Plans, released the following statement:

"Health plans are focused on advancing comprehensive, bipartisan health care reform that covers every American, improves quality, and makes health care coverage more affordable. Our community has proposed guaranteed coverage for pre-existing conditions, discontinuing rating based on a person's health status or gender, and a personal coverage requirement to get everyone into the system. We have proposed far-reaching administrative reforms to slash paperwork, reduce medical errors, and ensure doctors and hospitals can focus on patient care."

On the net:

Read the Health Care Reform bill introduced by Senator Max Baucus (D.-Mont.) also called America's Healthy Future Act. (http://finance.senate.gov/sitepages/leg/LEG%202009/091609%20Americas_Healthy_Future_Act.pdf)

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(http://finance.senate.gov/sitepages/leg/LEG%202009/091609%20Americas_Healthy_Future_Act.pdf)