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## Informal poll by Dems at county fair shows support for public option

### Edwards insists it be part of health care reform

by C. Benjamin Ford | Staff Writer

Walt Sonnevile waited patiently in the Montgomery County Democratic Party tent at the Montgomery County fair to talk health care reform and to pass out a survey sheet on the issue.

But with sweltering afternoon temperatures one day last week, the crowds appeared more interested in the midway attractions than in the most hotly debated issue of the summer.

"Most coming by have been sympathetic for health care reform," Sonnevile said Thursday. "The occasional Republican comes by and snarls."

In the nonscientific polling of about 500 fair-goers, 78 percent said they support a government-backed plan that would compete with private insurance plans, while 12 percent opposed it and 10 percent had no opinion.

A recent national Survey USA poll for activist group MoveOn.org showed that 77 percent supported a government-backed public option.

Some backers of reform believe the effort gained steam last week when there was a move to pass health care legislation without the support of congressional Republicans.

White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel and Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nevada) both signaled that Republicans had shown a lack of good faith in negotiations, even as the Democrats' Progressive Caucus indicated that it was prepared to reject health care legislation that did not include a public option to compete with private insurance companies.

"It looks like the Republicans have finally outed themselves as not negotiating in good faith, and if the Democrats have any brains at all they'll press forward for a good bill, whether or not it is bipartisan," said Sean Dobson, director of the advocacy group Progressive Maryland.

But U.S. Rep. Roscoe G. Bartlett, the state's lone Republican in Congress who represents a portion of Montgomery County, believes the Democrats in the House of Representatives killed bipartisanship on the issue, according to his spokeswoman Lisa Wright.

"There was no effort on the part of the majority in the House to reach a compromise," Wright said.

Bartlett (R-Dist. 6) of Buckeystown, who fundamentally believes that health care should not fall under Congress' authority, opposes any bill that includes a public option, she said.

He favors a House health care proposal that includes tort reform as one of its foundations.

"When people have the facts, the great wisdom in the country lies outside the Beltway with the people he represents," Wright said.

Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. Donna F. Edwards (D-Dist. 4) of Fort Washington, whose district includes part of Montgomery County, believes that the legislation must include a public option.

"My progressive colleagues and I and millions of Americans were disappointed when single-payer was taken off the table during the beginning of the health care reform debate," Edwards said. "Now, a strong public health insurance option is the only option for real and meaningful health care reform."

Edwards pointed out health insurance premiums for Marylanders have increased 64 percent from 2000 to 2007 — three times faster than the median incomes of residents.

While favoring health care reform, U.S. Rep. Christopher Van Hollen Jr. (D-Dist. 8) of Kensington has not made clear whether he would support legislation that fails to include a public option.

Do you have health insurance?

-Yes: 94 percent

-No: 6 percent

Do you believe health care costs are too high?

-Yes: 89 percent

-No: 6 percent

-No opinion: 5 percent

Do you support health care reform that covers the uninsured and brings down the costs for everyone?

-Yes: 85 percent

-No: 9 percent

-No opinion: 5 percent

Do you believe the public has overreacted at some town meetings on health care?

-Yes: 80 percent

-No: 12 percent

-No opinion: 8 percent

Do you support a government backed plan that would compete with private insurance plans?

-Yes: 78 percent

-No: 12 percent

-No opinion: 10 percent

Source: Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee informal poll