

# Protesters back health bill

Unions join D.C. march to 'arrest' insurance execs

By Kim Geiger  
TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

WASHINGTON — In a reverse twist on the old protester tactic of getting arrested to make a point, union leaders and other backers of President Barack Obama's health care plan issued "citizen's arrest" warrants for health insurance executives Tuesday, accusing them of exploiting consumers. The "warrants," delivered to police during a demonstration outside an insurance industry meeting at a Washington hotel, were a bid to dramatize protesters' call for insurance reform — and to build public support for health care legislation.

The demonstration, which drew several thousand protesters from across the nation, was organized by groups that for more than a year have pushed Congress to create a government-run insurance plan to compete with private insurers as part of a national health care overhaul.

While that policy objective, known as the public option, is not part of the health care legislation pending in Congress, the groups are nonetheless mounting a multimillion-dollar campaign to promote the bill. The effort will continue in coming weeks, with more demonstrations, paid advertising and other events, including a hearing to take place Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

"We're doing something that we should have done a while ago," said Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. "We've got to go out and



WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY PHOTO

Supporters of national health care legislation protest Tuesday outside the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington, D.C. Demonstrators delivered to police "citizen's arrest" warrants for insurance executives as America's Health Insurance Plans' annual policy conference took place in the hotel.

uncertain. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said House leaders had not committed to finishing work on the health care bill by March 18, as White House press secretary Robert Gibbs had suggested last week.

"None of us" has agreed to that deadline, Hoyer said. But he added, "We are trying to do this as soon as possible."

tactic that prevents filibusters. She is being challenged in this year's primary by a more liberal Democrat, and unions are actively supporting the challenger, Lt. Gov. Bill Halter.

"I think we'll take her out," McEntee said. "Just by doing it, I think it sends a message to members of Congress: They've got to listen to us."

## Tuesday's developments

**DO AS WE SAY, NOT AS WE DO:** Although the latest Associated Press-GfK poll indicates a large majority of Americans demand bipartisanship, it found virtually no change in the public deadlock over health care legislation, with 41 percent of respondents in favor, 43 percent opposed and 16 percent undecided.

**ADVERTISING BLITZ:** A coalition of business groups led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce unveiled a new TV ad campaign, set to begin Wednesday, attacking the legislation as too costly at a

## Union, Other Healthcare Bill Supporters 'Arrest' Health Insurance Leaders

Reporting from Washington, March 9, 2010

In a reverse twist on the old protesters' tactic of getting arrested to make a point, union leaders and other backers of President Obama's healthcare plan issued "citizen's arrest" warrants for health insurance executives Tuesday — accusing them of exploiting consumers.

The "warrants," delivered to police during a demonstration outside an insurance industry meeting at a Washington hotel, were an attempt to dramatize protesters' call for insurance reform — and to build public support for the Democrats' healthcare legislation.

The demonstration, which drew several thousand protesters from as far away as Illinois and California, was organized by groups that for more than a year have pushed Congress to create a government-run insurance plan to compete with private insurers as part of national healthcare overhaul.

While that policy objective, known as the public option, is not part of the healthcare legislation pending in Congress, the groups are nonetheless mounting a multi-million dollar campaign to promote the bill. The effort

will continue in coming weeks, with more demonstrations, paid advertising and other events, including a hearing to take place Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

"We're doing something that we should have done a while ago," said Gerald McEntee, president of AFSCME. "We've got to go out and fight them . . . We've got the money to go out and do that. Whatever it takes, we'll do, we'll use it."

But on Capitol Hill, the prospects for passing a bill remained mired in political uncertainty. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said House leaders had not committed to finishing work on the healthcare bill by March 18, as White House press secretary Robert Gibbs had suggested last week.

"None of us" have agreed to that deadline, Hoyer said. But he added, "We are trying to do this as soon as possible."

Hoyer said he was planning to meet soon with Rep. Bart Stupak (D-Mich.) to discuss the legislation's abortion provisions. Stupak, a leader among anti-abortion Democrats who have threatened to vote against the bill if it includes the Senate language, said recently that he thought an agreement was possible.

Hoyer also dismissed an assertion by Eric Massa, a New York Democrat who recently resigned in the wake of allegations that he had harassed a staff member, that he had been forced out by Democratic leaders because he had voted against the House health care bill. "It is absolutely untrue that there was any relationship between the action and the health care bill," Hoyer said.

At the protest, McEntee said the unions are firing back at uncooperative Democrats.

Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark, is one such lawmaker. Lincoln opposes the use of reconciliation, a parliamentary tactic that prevents filibusters. She's being challenged in this year's primary by a more liberal Democrat, and the unions are actively supporting the challenger.

"I think we'll take her out," McEntee said. "Just by doing it, I think it sends a message to members of Congress - they've got to listen to us."

Gibbs asserted again on Tuesday that a healthcare reform vote could happen before Obama leaves for Indonesia on March 18. He said the date came up in discussions with lawmakers.

Asked about the protest and arrests, Gibbs said, "I don't know the public relations value of that."

At the rally, AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka referred to insurers as "dark titans." And McEntee warned Congress: "You'd better take our side before we come and arrest you."

Meanwhile, a coalition of business groups led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce began a new TV ad campaign attacking the legislation as too costly at a time when businesses are struggling to recover from the last recession.

"We thought Washington understood that jobs was the priority," said R. Bruce Josten, the chamber's chief Washington lobbyist and a leading critic of Democrats' healthcare initiative.

Janet Hook and Noam N. Levey contributed to this report. [kim.geiger@latimes.com](mailto:kim.geiger@latimes.com)  
<http://baltimoresun.com/entertainment/michael-jackson/sc-dc-health-protests09-20100309,0,7286987,print.story>