

Valley Advocate – Editorial: 2018 Should be the year Massachusetts Moves Toward Single Payer

By Dave Eisenstadter - Jan 16, 2018

I recently got my first pay stub of the year. I was curious to see how the Republican tax plan would affect me, if at all, but it turns out that none of us will see the results until February. So stay tuned.

One thing I did notice, however, is that (surprise!) my contribution to the health insurance plan is going up.

Over the course of 2017, I paid \$4,723.94 toward health insurance for my family, and this year it will top \$4,800. That's more than \$400 per month on health insurance, not including dental. That doesn't even include the money my employer pays to the insurer on my behalf, which comes to just over twice that amount – money they are spending on me that otherwise could be a part of my wages.

That number dwarfs my state taxes, the withholdings of which came to \$1,073.16 this year, according to my final pay stub of the year.

Looking at these two numbers – on the one hand about \$4,700 in insurance premiums and on the other less than \$1,100 in state taxes – it's not hard to see the economic argument for a statewide single payer system. Even if I had to pay five times the state taxes I pay now, an obscene and completely unrealistic increase if such a plan was passed, I would still benefit because my insurance premiums would disappear.

And with Obamacare constantly under siege in Washington, there has never been a better time to look at a state single payer plan.

In November, the state Senate passed a sweeping health care bill, which included an amendment to study single payer in the state. Now the Massachusetts House will take up its version of the bill. Northampton's Democratic Rep., Peter Kocot, is the chairman of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, and has been supportive of looking at single payer for the state. He hopes to include a provision in the bill that will study the economics of a single payer plan over a three-year period.

"Once you have that information, you have a path forward to move towards it," Kocot said.

Experts including University of Massachusetts Amherst Economics Professor Gerald Friedman have indicated that there are massive savings that can be realized under a single payer plan.

A hearing on the House's health care bill will take place in the spring, though a date has not yet been chosen, Kocot said.

Meanwhile, activist groups are gearing up to organize around single payer this year. Our Revolution Massachusetts, Western Mass Neighbor to Neighbor, Western Mass Medicare for All, and the Pioneer Valley Socialists of America held an event earlier this month in Holyoke about the need to pass a single payer system.

Judy Atkins of Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution has been frustrated by bills supporting a statewide single payer system consistently being stuck in committee despite the fact that single payer is on the Democratic party platform in the state.

“The leadership never backs it,” she said. “There are a ton of cosponsors on the bill, and it still never makes it to the floor. I’m beginning to think it’s sort of like the \$15 minimum wage and parental leave, these bills that have to go to a statewide ballot in order for the Legislature to take anything seriously.”

In our recent cover story about the 2018 ballot measures (“[Getting on the Ballot](#),” January 4-10, 2018), Rep. John Scibak of South Hadley told writer Meg Bantle that ballot measures are a poor way to make policy. Atkins agreed that for a complicated issue like single payer, a law originating from the Legislature rather than a ballot measure would be ideal.

At the same time, she has worked on this issue for decades and has not seen progress. Deborah Levenson, co-convener of [Western Mass Medicare for All](#), said she believes the Legislature is now taking the idea more seriously. At the same time, she knows such a bill would face powerful opposition forces in the state.

“The insurance lobby is huge and well funded,” she said. “[We’re] facing big pharma, facing the big hospitals that do not want to touch this issue.”

This is a struggle well worth fighting for. Just about everybody stands to benefit from lowered medical expenses, eliminated insurance premiums, and a better overall health care system.

Let your legislators know that we want Massachusetts to continue to innovate on health care and lead the nation into adopting the single payer system embraced by most of the rest of the world.

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