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Groups Mark Progress, Challenges in Human Rights ***New Health Care Law Celebrated on Human Right's Day*** ***2010***

Charleston, WV - Human Rights Day is celebrated around the world on Dec. 10th. It commemorates the United Nations General Assembly's adoption and promotion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Dec. 10, 1948.

This day, however, has deep roots in American history, beginning with the amendments to the US Constitution that comprise the Bill of Rights and continuing through to President Franklin Roosevelt's call for a "second bill of rights" in his annual message to Congress in January 1944. Among the rights which Roosevelt enumerated was "*The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health.*"

The UN Universal Declaration states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

West Virginians United for Social and Economic Justice, an umbrella coalition of community, religious and labor organizations hail progress made towards the right to health care in the United States in 2010, with the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act.

According to Gary Zuckett, chair of the coalition, "The passage of health care reform this spring marks the most significant step towards universal coverage since the passage of Medicare and Medicaid in the 1960s. It has the promise of providing health coverage to nearly all Americans by 2014, with major reforms that are already taking place."

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Several challenges remain, however. According to Renate Pore, health care analyst for the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, “This landmark legislation is already facing challenges in the courts and may come under attack in the new Congress. It’s important to educate the public about the realities of the new law and its potential to expand coverage to millions of Americans who don’t have it and to around 200,000 uninsured West Virginians.”

Perry Bryant, executive director of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care also notes that West Virginia has the challenging task of setting up a health care exchange where individuals and businesses can shop for easy access to health insurance options. “It’s going to be important to do this right. Our state’s health care exchange needs to represent the needs of consumers rather than people who have financial interests involved.”

The Rev. Jeff Allen, director of the West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition, a project of the West Virginia Council of Churches, said that “providing for the basic health care needs of all is a moral imperative for people of faith and for people of good will.”

“The labor movement has worked long and hard towards the goal of universal health care,” said Larry Matheny, Secretary-Treasurer of the WV AFL-CIO, “not only for union members but for every American. We will continue to work hard to see that reform is properly implemented in the interest of every American.”

Rick Wilson, director of the American Friends Service Committee WV Economic Justice Project, said that “Often in the past when we’ve observed Human Rights Day, we focused on all those things we haven’t yet accomplished. It’s nice this year to celebrate a major human rights victory—and to prepare to defend it.”

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