



Tuesday, February 19, 2008

UAW opposes Blues Cross Blue Shield bills

DETROIT – The UAW said today that health care legislation proposed by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan would be a “step backward” for health care in Michigan.

“The market for individual health insurance in Michigan is broken,” said UAW President Ron Gettelfinger, “but these bills are not the fix we need.”

For decades, Gettelfinger said, Michigan citizens have been able to secure affordable health insurance in the individual market without regard to their health status. The Blue Cross Blue Shield proposals linking insurance premiums to health status “would shift costs to the chronically ill and the aged – those most in need of health insurance. That’s not an acceptable solution to our health care crisis.”

The proposed legislation claims to guarantee access to health care, offering a so-called high-risk pool to those who will be rejected because of their medical history. “The high-risk pool is actually a high-price pool, and many individual customers will not be able to afford it,” Gettelfinger said. “There’s no guaranteed coverage if you can’t afford it – a fate awaiting many of our most vulnerable citizens.”

While pushing aggressively for so-called “reform” legislation, Blue Cross Blue Shield has not provided data on how the proposed bills would affect the premiums paid by individual purchasers of health insurance.

“It would be irresponsible for state legislators to vote on these bills without knowing how it will affect the health insurance bills paid by consumers,” said Gettelfinger. “Without that information, deliberations on this proposal should not continue.”

The UAW also opposes a companion bill sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield that would allow the company to expand its business to include other forms of insurance.

“Blue Cross Blue Shield has no significant expertise in these areas of the insurance market,” Gettelfinger said. “It would be counterproductive for the Blues to divert capital and other resources from their primary mission of providing quality health care at an affordable price to Michigan citizens.

“The challenges of the individual health care market in Michigan cannot be borne by any one company, but must be equitably shared among all insurers. UAW members will work with the insurance industry, employers, consumers and other stakeholders to ensure that quality, affordable insurance is available to everyone in Michigan.”

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