

Thousands attend free health care event in Detroit

A WSWWS reporting team
10 August 2017

Thousands of metro Detroit residents, seeking dental and optical care, are attending a free health clinic, which started Wednesday at the Cobo Hall convention center. Hundreds lined up outside before doors opened at 6 a.m. highlighting the medical crisis in the state, where an estimated 600,000 residents are uninsured and far more cannot afford high co-pays and deductibles. The three-day event is expected to attract more than 4,000 people.

The Motor City Medical Mission (MCM) was organized by California and Florida-based religious institutions—Freedom Clinic and United Hands—which have held similar events with volunteer medical professionals throughout the US and other countries.

“The primary need is dental care,” Ann Burnett, executive director of the Motor City Medical Mission Project, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “Those that come in are in many cases living with pain and can’t get treatment for things such as abscesses. We also have eye exams and can give them reading and prescription glasses. One gentleman came in for dental services and we were able to pick up early stages of cancer, and probably saved his life.

Comparing health conditions in the US to Latin American countries her group has gone to, Burnett said, “We just came back from Suriname and there are a lot of similarities with the US. There was only one country we were blown away with, and that was Guatemala. Only two out of very 1,000 to 1,500 people we saw suffered from diabetes or hypertension. We were used to seeing a figure of 70 percent in the US, some of it undiagnosed.”

“We are struck by how large the need is locally,” said Dr. David Williams, who is on the board of United Hands and is a professor of public health, sociology and African American studies at Harvard. “We are seeing people who are employed, but can’t afford a tooth extraction. The US ranks near the bottom in health care. Even Cuba has a higher life expectancy than the US.”

Those attending included entire families, employed and unemployed workers, retirees, and military veterans, who were made up of different races, nationalities and ages. There was overwhelming anger over the lack of affordable health care, with many expressing anger against both Trump and Obama, and insisting that necessities like teeth cleanings, fillings and a pair of glasses should be basic rights for everyone. Some who spoke with WSWWS reporters were in visible pain.

“Outside all the glitz and neon lights in the downtown area, in the neighborhoods working class people haven’t had any wage increases and they can hardly take care of their families,” said Jeremy, who has worked restaurant jobs and is studying for his

Commercial Driver’s License. “My dad was the only one who worked and he raised a family of four in a suburban home. Now me and my wife both work and we struggle to make ends meet.

“I’m here for dental work because we don’t have insurance. I need at least two implants and a couple of fillings. I can’t drink any cold or hot foods. You learn deal with the pain. There’s lots of people in pain, that’s why there’s the opioid crisis. It is a lot cheaper to hand somebody oxycodone than pay for their physical therapy.

Antoinette brought her mother, Yvonne, a retired federal worker, for dental care. “The retirees paid their dues and they should be given the medical care they were promised. America is the richest country in the world. The senators don’t have the same insurance we do. Everyone should have medical care,” she said.

Of the pharmaceutical corporations, Karen said, “They don’t want cures; they want paychecks.” Speaking of her brother, who was given at least five stents before finally receiving a triple-bypass surgery, she said the insurance companies are “doing just enough to keep the patients alive,” when they ought to be addressing patients’ real medical problems.

Candice White, a home health and drug rehabilitation aide, said, “If you work in the medical field the insurance costs so much. They take \$200 out of every paycheck for health insurance, plus \$11 for dental. After taxes, I’m bringing home \$600 every 10 tens, and that’s if I get full-time hours.”

Pat Stephens, who used to work for Texas Instruments in Dallas, said, “These corporations are making all kinds of money and they are nickel and diming workers on health benefits. Texas Instruments was a revolving door: the older workers were quitting after not getting any raises and the new ones were coming in at half the pay.

“The government should make the employers pay for health care and public schools. The government bailed out the banks and the auto companies. I’m going around with my teeth hurting and don’t have thousands for implants or fillings. We should get the exact same health care as the senators.”

Karen Turner-Bryant is a worker at Fiat Chrysler. Commenting on the role of the United Auto Workers union, she said, “They told us to vote in favor of the last contract because it was as good as it’s going to get.” Now she can’t afford her prescription medication or glasses, and is forced to wait in line at the free clinic for medical attention.

“The whole system needs to be reorganized,” said Sylvia.

“There should be universal health care. Proactive care is better than reactive care. That would be the goal. It’s the same thing with education. It should not be about which district or area you live, it should be for everyone. Instead, all the money goes to waste in the wars.

“Congress votes to pay themselves, but they won’t raise the minimum wage. Health care costs are going up, living expenses are going up, but the budget of taking care of people hasn’t. There are people making money off the people who are struggling. Elections are just putting a plug on the boat. It’s still going to sink. You have to start with a rebuilding of the whole boat.”

“I’ve been following the health care crisis for eight years—it sucks,” said Tobie. “It’s just a bunch of politicians giving lip service. People are hurting, and they don’t care. You can’t use your health insurance because your deductible is so crazy high. So, what’s the use of getting it? Me and my wife are paying \$14,000 a year for health insurance for a family of four, and we can’t afford to go to the doctor.

“They’ve got money but they’d just as soon put it into missiles and bombs instead of helping people here. They’re always looking to start another war. They want to go liberate Iraq and Afghanistan, why? So, they can’t have any health insurance either? They’re going to make it just like here? What’s so great about here? They say they want to spread our message, but it isn’t a very good message.”

“The top five percent of people have all the money, and they say it’s going to trickle down to other people. But they’re just going to keep all their money.”

Josefean is on Medicare, but “that does nothing,” she said. She was given the run-around when she tried to enroll on the Obamacare exchanges. One person would direct her to the next, in an endless chase of phone calls. “All they care about is money.”

Darrell has health insurance with Blue Cross Blue Shield through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchange. He complained that many places don’t accept his insurance, and that he has to pay out of pocket. Dental care isn’t covered under his plan.

Rosetta complained about the “health care racket,” in which she has to struggle to pay \$500 per month for insurance. The stress of this financial burden might “give me high blood pressure,” for which the pharmaceutical companies promote drugs that create their own side-effects, creating a snowball effect of prescriptions and ailments.

Chufon waited in line for dental care. She works as an “independent contractor,” which allows her employer to avoid paying for any healthcare. She expressed anger over the opioid epidemic. “The government allows these pharmaceutical companies to sell those pills, knowing full well what happens. People get addicted, and then what? They turn to the streets.”

Beverly waited in line with her children. “Everybody is experiencing the same thing,” she said, looking around at the long line of people waiting for medical attention. “It doesn’t matter if you have insurance; you can’t have quality healthcare.” Speaking of the ultra-wealthy and their paid politicians, she said, “I don’t think anything they’re doing benefits us. They have the best health care. They don’t care about the small people. They only want what’s good for them. Take care of the small people!”

Denise Bass, a housekeeper for 21 years lost her job two years ago. “I need to get work on my front two teeth. They did some work already but it was just a temporary fix. To get it properly fixed I’d have to pay \$800 out of pocket. I can’t afford that.

“People are already suffering and they are cutting Medicaid and other programs. I recently saw on the news, lines of people at another health clinic in Virginia. “It doesn’t matter what nationality, ethnicity, race you are, everyone needs healthcare at some point. That’s life, you need it to live.”

Tony Valentine drives a shuttle bus for the Detroit Medical Center. “Trump is a business person who wants everyone to work—even senior citizens who have been working their whole lives. He wants to cut Medicaid. But America is the richest country in the world. There’s no reason to cut Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security or any of it.

“Up until October of last year I was getting \$194 every month in food assistance. After October, it got knocked down to \$19 a month. Who could survive on that? They want us to get Obamacare but that’s expensive too.”

Jamel, a small business owner, said, “The economy is not doing well for most people, many people don’t have jobs. You’ll be seeing a lot more events like this if Republicans carry through their cuts to health care.”

Therrie Hill, Jr., a 73-year-old Vietnam War veteran who is ninety percent disabled due to Agent Orange poisoning, said, “I get some care through the VA because of my service but my grandson isn’t getting any of that care. He’s just a year out of high school and I’m here to get him some basic dental work.

“I am a native Detroit and was drafted immediately out of high school. I came back in July 1967, one day before the Detroit rebellion began. I was in one war zone and came back to another. I saw tanks rolling down the street from my porch—they wouldn’t let us leave the city. You can imagine that it was even worse for me, because it brought back all of the fighting in Vietnam.”

“I filed a claim for compensation for injuries in 2002 but I’m still waiting. They’ll probably keep me waiting until I die. It’s a shame there’s a long line like this in America. Trump says he wants to make America great?” Therrie said, as he gestured to the line around him. “How’s this?”



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