

On December 8, I traveled to Washington with a message from the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting to our Representative and Senators:

"Our Quaker testimonies of equality, community, and simplicity tell us that health care is a human right. We ask our representatives in Washington to ensure that all of us receive the health care we need just as the citizens of other wealthy nations do. We particularly endorse Medicare for All or, at minimum, a robust public option."

I went to bring this message and to hear their responses. I had, via email, arranged appointments with legislative aides for our two Senators and with Representative Price at 2:30, 3:30, and 4:30.

I arrived at **Senator Hagan's** office at 2:30 precisely, a bit flustered and out of breath, hauling with me my laptop, small suitcase/backpack, and overcoat. The Meeting's conversation with Kay Hagan had begun in September. The Peace and Social Concerns Committee and other interested individuals had initially had an email correspondence with the coordinator of her Greensboro office, Sue Wink, who did a good job of addressing our statement and our concerns. Sue arranged a November conference call with Michelle Adams, the Senator's legislative assistant on health care. Five of us joined that conference call, speaking with the well-informed Ms. Adams at some length about universal health care (the Senator was not ready to push that far), budget neutrality (the Senator was firm that any health care proposal must be budget neutral, but is not willing to apply that same standard to our occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan), and about the robust public option (the Senator had supported the HELP committee's reasonably robust public option as part of the package from which the uninsured, small businesses, and others could choose, but was also open to ideas that would weaken that option, such as triggers and co-ops.)

Michelle was not available on the day of my DC visit so I met with Devan Barber, legislative correspondent for the Senator. I asked her whether there was any scenario under which Senator Hagan would join the Republican filibuster, which some anti-public-option Democrats had been threatening to do. Devan assured me that she could not envision that. She also assured me that it was unlikely the Senator would vote against the final package, although she felt that there was always a chance that some amendment would be attached to the bill which would make it impossible for the Senator to support. Finally, I asked her to thank the Senator for her support of health care reform, said the bill was already far from our ideal, but that we wanted it to pass without further compromise. I asked her also to support Senator Sanders' amendment, which would allow states that wished to to institute single-payer systems of their own.

I next arrived at **Senator Burr's** office for my 3:30 appointment to meet with Anna Abram, Senator Burr's public health policy director. I shared our statement with her and told her I wanted to let the Senator know that my experience of North Carolina voters was different from his. All the North Carolina voters I had spoken with wanted health reform now. I explained that we were not satisfied with this bill, but we were much less satisfied with the status quo and were very unhappy with the Senator's clear intent to delay the bill and to filibuster it to death. Anna explained that the Senator had not had time to read the massive bill yet, and that he was looking for a sustainable fix to our health care problems.

She said that his commitment to health care reform was demonstrated by his Patients' Choice Act, which I had read summaries of on the train ride from North Carolina. The Patients' Choice Act is designed to give citizens money with which to buy their own health insurance. Going back to our original statement, I wondered whether Senator Burr had a philosophical difference with us regarding the idea of health care as a right. She said she did not know and would get back to me. I thanked her for her time and hurried on to Rep. Price's office.

I arrived at Rep. Price's office just about 4:30 where I met with Rep. Price and Laura Thrift, one of the Representative's legislative assistants. Rep. Price supports single-payer health care in principle, but said it has no traction, largely because the Clinton reform effort showed that many, many voters just want to keep what they have. Rep. Price was comfortable with our statement, although he said he prefers to speak about meeting human needs instead of about health care as a human right. Regarding the public option, Laura said she believed that, for both political and policy reasons, it was good to start with a small public option in the health care exchange. She feared that going too big too fast could lead to a disaster that would besmirch government-sponsored insurance for decades to come. I asked them both how we could help make our wishes come true. They said that calls matter; that passion is important. One anti-health-care-reform advocate has called the Representative one hundred times. Laura said that Rep. Price could be counted on to vote the right way, and that she felt buoyed by calls and visits such as ours.

On my way to Union Station, I happened by a candlelight vigil supporting health care reform and a strong public option. It was fairly small, but, like Laura, I felt buoyed.

Tom Munk