

Rural Dwellers Want Equal Shot At Health Care - Mille Lacs Messenger

Written by Jim Wishner

Thursday, 03 September 2009 09:09

MINNEAPOLIS - Rural Minnesota wants a seat at the table. That's the message of a letter-writing campaign to Congress underway from advocates who want to make sure all Americans, wherever they live, have a say in any changes being considered in the nation's health care delivery system.

Niel Ritchie, executive director of the *League of Rural Voters of Minnesota*, says for too long "outstaters" have had to settle for less when it comes to health care.

"We know that rural residents are more likely to die from non-auto-related injuries. They receive less treatment for chronic disease, and they have generally lower-quality overall health. Combine that with an alarming shortage of hospitals and health-care professionals - there are not enough providers to meet basic needs."

Senior citizens are less able to afford life-saving medications because of their higher rate of poverty and lower level of prescription drug coverage, Ritchie adds. He says the best way to operate a fair and affordable health system would be to make sure there's competition among providers that includes a strong, public plan option. Those opposing such a plan say it would drive up taxes and limit provider choice.

Ritchie notes that while millions cannot afford or get insurance, profits for the top 10 insurance companies increased 430 percent this decade. He says voters need to get out the message that that's unacceptable.

"We know that health insurance companies profit from denying care to their customers. It costs more to deliver care in rural areas because the density is less. So, health insurance companies are a significant part of the problem."

Insurance companies point out they are operating within legal regulatory guidelines.

More information is available at www.leagueofruralvoters.org .