

The logo features a stylized flame in shades of red and white, with the text "Rekindling Reform Review" in a bold, dark red serif font overlaid on the bottom portion of the flame.

# Rekindling Reform Review

Vol.1, No. 2, July, 2007

## Rekindling Reform Holds 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

### Yale University's Ted Marmor links universal health care reform to turning back Medicare privatization

A capacity crowd filled the Cherkasky-Davis Conference Center on June 5 for Rekindling Reform's 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. The program featured renowned Medicare expert Ted Marmor, author of the landmark text, *The Politics of Medicare*. Representatives from RR sponsors and others gathered for a reception, caught up on conversation, and enjoyed the impressive view from the 33<sup>rd</sup> floor penthouse of the SEIU building in midtown Manhattan.

The formal program began with remarks from RR Convenors Karen Ballard and Sid Socolar, summarizing RR's activities for the 2006-2007 Program Year and plans for 2007-8. Next, two advocacy leaders in New York were honored for their combined efforts in furthering universal health care reform in New York State: Mark Dunlea of the Hunger Action Network of New York State and Mark Hannay of the Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign. Together, the two Marks helped to spearhead a 3-year effort by the New York Universal Health Care Options Campaign that resulted in the state undertaking a formal study of strategies to achieve universal health care across the state, a process now underway.

The highlight of the evening was Dr. Marmor's keynote speech. He pinpointed the key health reform issue prior to the election of 2008: protecting Medicare to safeguard its social insurance basis and potential foundation as a universal health care program for all Americans. He tracked the Bush administration's strategy, through several provisions of the "Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA), "to privatize Medicare and destroy its fiscal integrity, thereby undermining its potential as a national health care program. RR's recent white paper "Reclaim and Strengthen Medicare" details this effort, is available on RR's website (URL?).

Dr. Marmor urged the audience to give priority to the protection of Medicare as a way to lay the groundwork for

universal health care reform in 2009-10. While universal health legislation is not expected to move forward in Congress until the next President takes office, in his view it is possible now to mount a strong effort to roll back the key provisions of the MMA.

### RR Medicare White Paper Provokes Strong Response

"Reclaim and Strengthen Medicare" is receiving kudos from advocacy quarters nationwide, in particular from the Medicare Rights Center (MRC), the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, the Center for Medicare Advocacy, and the Center for Economic and Policy Research. The June 7 edition of MRC's weekly e-newsletter *Aesclepios* (named after the Greek god of medicine) quoted from the RR white paper and summarized many of its arguments for readers, along with a succinct summary of Medicare's history, the rationale behind it, and the decades-long efforts of privatizers. The issue is available on MRC's website, ([www.medicarerights.org](http://www.medicarerights.org)). Coincidentally, one of the newest pillars of Medicare privatization, subsidies for private "Medicare Advantage" plans, is now under attack in Congress, as it debates where to find monies to fund expansion of the State Child Health Insurance program (SCHIP). As the saying goes, "When in doubt, claim (some) credit." There's no doubt, however, that RR's analysis has added good fuel to this fire.

### RR and Advocates Meet with State Insurance Department after Long Hiatus

In mid-June, a diverse group of consumer advocates, including representatives from RR, held a meeting in lower Manhattan with Eric Dinallo, New York's new Superintendent of Insurance (SID). It was the first time in over a dozen years that such a meeting occurred. Nearly three dozen advocates crowded around a large table to share their concerns with Mr. Dinallo, and heard his initial thoughts on making health insurance more useful and affordable for consumers. Also present was Troy Oeschner, the new Deputy Superintendent for Health within SID, who spoke about the Spitzer administration's new interagency

workgroup on universal health care, and the state's plans for an independent study of universal health care options. He said that so far, plans are for the state to model and compare two basic strategies: one, a fully public program covering everyone, vs. a "mixed/hybrid" multi-payer model similar to the new Massachusetts program. All, on all sides, felt the meeting was productive and there are plans for a follow-up meeting in the fall.

## **RR Pushes Rx Drug Reform Bills at End of State Legislative Session**

The State Senate picked up its marbles and went home in June, leaving much legislative business unfinished in Albany. Left behind were bills to rein in the more egregious practices of the prescription drug industry, such as overpriced products, undisclosed gifts to health care providers, and hoarded windfall profits. For a couple of years, RR has worked alongside AARP/New York, Consumers Union, NYPIRG, and other groups in the "Rx Affordability Campaign" to promote ways to lower Rx drug costs for consumers and expand access to expensive medications. Various drug-related bills were seen as worthy in themselves, but also as strategic wedge issues to expand the political context for broader health care reform. One would have required drug manufacturers to disclose gifts over \$75 in value to the public; a second would have created a bulk purchasing program for public insurance programs, employers, union plans, and uninsured consumers to use; and a third would have begun to regulate the profits of special "pharmacy benefit managers."

## **New "Sicko" Film Elevates the Cry for National Health Care Reform**

RRers are headed to the movies! Michael Moore's new film, *Sicko*, is generating LOTS of buzz among health care reform circles nationwide, and provoking much discussion among the public about America's terribly dysfunctional health care system. Critics have generally praised the film as one of Moore's best, and the box office has been strong. Moore's previous well-known films include *Roger and Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, and *Fahrenheit 911*. His new piece is a point-of-view exposé of health care, American style, aiming much of its ammunition at private insurers, the drug industry, and our political process, using a mixture of moving and humorous life-stories of real people, to paint reality. During the second half of the film, Moore travels to Canada, the United Kingdom, France, and Cuba to talk with real people and health professionals about how national health systems really work. In the end, he poses the question of how to shift health care reform from a discussion of "me" to "we," and the film becomes a polemic on social welfare policy. Nationwide, doctors, nurses, and advocates are taking to the streets and mall parking lots to leaflet moviegoers – led here in New York by RR leaders Physicians for a National Health Program, and the New York State Nurses Association. A word to the wise: Grab your popcorn and go!

## **RR Leaders "Retreat" to Plan for the Coming Year**

In mid-June, members of RR's Steering Committee gathered at CUNY's Joseph Murphy Center for Labor and Community Studies to review the past year and ponder the coming one. Program ideas and strategic priorities for 2007-8 were discussed, as well as ways to enhance RR's operations and better serve the needs of RR's sponsor organizations. In particular, "capacity building" was identified as a top concern to prepare RR for a period of renewed action regarding health care reform

Looking toward the fall, RR's National Programs Committee will be collaborating with NYU's Wagner School of Public Service and the League of Women Voters of NYC to produce a series of forums on the health care reform proposals of each Presidential candidate, and will continue to foster awareness of the insidious privatization efforts of MMA 2003 (see above). RR's State Programs Committee will be tracking the State Health Department's new study of universal health care options, will work with advocates to assist the Spitzer administration's new interagency workgroup developing a health care reform agenda, and will be tracking the successes and failures of the universal health care efforts of other states. RR's Labor Committee will be writing a White Paper on labor's fundamental concerns for health care reform, and RR's new Communications Committee will be focusing on developing RR's web-based capabilities.

## **RR Achievements Require Resources – How YOU Can Contribute.**

Rekindling Reform accomplishes all the good work it does on a surprisingly minimal budget. While many RR sponsors provide in-kind support for our activities, there is also a need for *some* real money in the pot to pay our necessary expenses. To help support RR's work, individuals are asked for an annual minimum donation of \$25-50, and sponsor groups for \$100-250. Checks should be made out to "Community Studies of New York" (RR's fiscal sponsor), and please list "Rekindling Reform support" in the memo line. Contributions should be sent to: Community Studies of New York, 155 W. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, Suite 402, New York, N.Y. 10023. Thanks to check-writers for making it possible to do all that we do together through RR

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**Rekindling Reform is a joint project of academic programs, professional associations, civic associations, trade unions, faith communities, and health care advocates aimed at promoting quality affordable health care for all, by conducting educational activities, supporting public discussion and dialogue, and fostering collaboration on advocacy strategies.**