



Arkansas Education Association  
An NEA State Affiliate

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Contact: Lori Dimond  
(501) 375-4611, Ext. 118

### **Arkansas Education Association Advocates for Health Care Reform**

LITTLE ROCK – The Arkansas Education Association and Organizing for America held a press conference Wednesday, Aug. 26, in support of health care insurance reform.

AEA President Donna Morey joined Arkansas Senators Jimmy Jeffress and Joyce Elliott, and Arkansas Representatives Nancy Blount and Barbara Nix during the event, where they each spoke on the necessity for health care reform for educators and students in Arkansas' public schools.

Morey noted that over half a million Arkansans, including 69,000 children, are without health insurance, and so health care reform is a crucial ingredient for successful public schools. Following the National Education Association's platform on health care reform, she said, "The lack of necessary medical and dental services for children and students of all ages creates a serious impediment to the learning process. In addition, families with access to a regular source of medical care are more likely to keep the entire family healthy and create a better learning environment within the home."

Morey then delineated six key points that NEA believes that health care reform must include:

- Guaranteed coverage for the uninsured.
- Controlled costs, so that premiums and health care services are affordable to all, regardless of income or employment status.
- Provisions and standards related to medical safety and quality.
- Comprehensive health care coverage that includes, but not be limited to, medical, surgical, hospital, behavioral health, prescription drug, dental, vision, hearing, and long-term care services, and also allows choices of providers.
- Preventive, wellness, rehabilitative, and disease management programs.
- Use of health information technology to reduce medical errors and administrative costs.

Arkansas legislators who were present at the conference agree about the importance of health care reform.

Sen. Jeffress, a retired teacher and chair of the Senate Education Committee, has first-hand experience with the difficulties educators currently face. "I have a daughter who is following in my footsteps as a public school teacher," he said. "Her salary goes for her health insurance and daycare, and when she pays for that, she has nothing left over at the end of the month."

He expressed concern that the education profession will begin to suffer if a more affordable plan is not developed, because fewer people will want to become teachers in the face of such hefty health care expenses.

"I think it's a shame and a disgrace that we are citizens of the greatest nation on the face of the earth, the United States of America, and we do not provide universal coverage for all of our citizens," he said.

Rep. Nix also advocated for a government-based plan. "What we most need is health care that families can afford. If the child can't focus because he's sick, he can't learn," she said. "I really think there has to be a public option in there."

But as Sen. Joyce Elliott pointed out, no plan will be successful unless people unite toward a common goal. "I wish we would lower our voices, talk calmly to one another, and ... find a way to resolve the issue, and not continue to engage in disinformation and misinformation to rile people up to be against the idea of health care for everybody," she said.

Rep. Nancy Blount agreed and emphasized the importance of a national agenda for health care reform. "It's clear to me that states are not going to be able to come up with a health care system that will provide equal access and opportunity for all citizens," she said. "It is going to have to be a nationwide effort."

Organizing for America is a grassroots project of the Democratic National Committee dedicated to supporting President Barack Obama's agenda for change. For more info about OFA, visit their Web site at [www.barackobama.com/index.php](http://www.barackobama.com/index.php).

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