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9.8

During the oral communication section of the agenda for Tuesday, February 1, 2011, Shirley Ferrante spoke about senior issues.

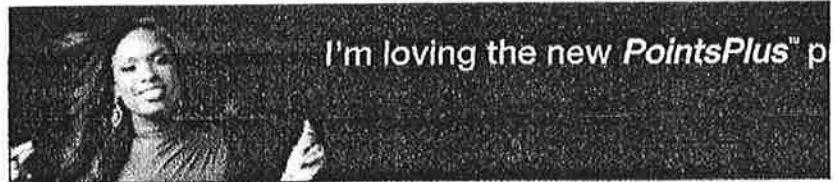
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**AGENDA NO.
9.8**

Submitted by Shirley Ferrante
2/1/2011 (date) Item oral comm

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Health care interests step up donations to Congress

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By *Diana Marrero and Sean Treanor*

Aug. 2, 2009

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Washington — With Congress waist-deep in the battle over landmark health care legislation, industry money is pouring into congressional campaign coffers - and Wisconsin's delegation is getting a cut of that cash.

In the first six months of 2009 alone, the health care sector has given \$11.4 million in campaign contributions to members of Congress, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan group that tracks money in politics. Campaign contributors - from insurance companies to hospitals to doctors - are showering Wisconsin members of Congress with donations.

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"There's tons of money coming in," said Mike Klein, of the Sunlight Foundation, who argues that the health care sector has significantly boosted its campaign donations to Congress in an attempt to get "a seat at the table" as the debate over health reform takes shape.

In Wisconsin, insurance giant Blue Cross/Blue Shield or people who work for the company are among the top campaign contributors to Rep. Paul Ryan's political committees so far this year with \$10,000 in donations, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. The Janesville Republican has collected more money from the insurance industry - \$493,000 - than from any other interest group during his 10 years in Congress.

Top donors for Madison Democrat Tammy Baldwin this year include the National Association of Retail Druggists, which has given \$2,000 to her campaign. Doctors, nurses and other health professionals have made roughly \$295,000 in donations to Baldwin since she was elected to the House in 1998.

Rep. Ron Kind, a Democrat from La Crosse, has received \$10,000 from the American College of Radiology, making it one of his biggest donors during the 2010 election cycle. Health professionals have given Kind \$335,000 in donations since his first congressional election in 1996, putting them among his top contributors.

All three Wisconsin members are playing large roles in the unfolding debate over health reform - the lawmakers each serve on key committees crafting the legislation in the House. Baldwin and Kind have been able to shape aspects of the legislation, and Ryan has become one of the leading voices against the current Democratic proposals.

Other Wisconsin lawmakers also are getting contributions from such groups as the American Hospital Association, the Orthopaedic Association and the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners. In all, the health sector has given at least \$200,000 to the state's congressional delegation this year.

Lawmakers deny influence

But Wisconsin members say the contributions aren't influencing the positions that they are taking on the health reform legislation that they are now working on, even as they admit that special interest groups do hold sway on Capitol Hill.

"Everybody knows where I stand," said Ryan, who has been pushing against a Democratic proposal to create government-run insurance to compete with insurance companies. "If people agree with my principles, then they support me. If they don't, they don't."

Baldwin also says she has been clear about her positions on the issue since she ran for Congress on a pledge to reform health care and offer universal insurance coverage. Kind, who initially voted against the bill in a committee vote but vowed to support the legislation after congressional leaders agreed to a few changes that he was advocating, said his focus is on "trying to produce the best bill possible."

Majority party gets more

Since Democrats took control of Congress in 2006, health care industry donors have been giving more campaign cash to Democrats than Republicans. Democrats have received about 63% of the health sector's donations so far this year. Overall, the industry appears to be on track to spend more on campaign contributions than in previous years, said David Levinthal, of the Center for Responsive Politics.

"They want the opportunity to get in front of the members of Congress who are perhaps on the verge of revolutionizing the entire health care system," he said.

It's a tactic that seems to work, Klein and others say.

"It's only human nature that people who are supporting you financially and who you interact with, you're going to give their arguments more credence than people you never talk to," Klein said.

In the midst of the debate, a number of lawmakers are holding fund-raisers thrown by health care lobbyists or organized around discussions on health care.

In May, executives of major insurance companies, hospitals and health care firms paid \$10,000 or more a person to attend a fund-raiser for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee headlined by Sen. Max Baucus, whose Senate Finance Committee is crafting the health care bill in the Senate.

Last week, Sen. Chuck Grassley and two other Republican senators appeared at a \$5,000-a-plate fund-raiser for the National Republican Senatorial Committee that was billed as a "round-table on health care issues."

Call for reform strong

Wisconsin members also have benefited from similar fund-raisers. In April, three lobbyists who represent pharmaceutical companies helped plan a fund-raiser for Ryan. Two of the hosts also represent medical associations.

That same month, Baldwin headlined a private dinner at the Capitol Hill home of John Weinfurter, a lobbyist who represents, among others, the drug company Foligo Therapeutics and the International Association of Medical Equipment Remarketers and Servicers.

Tickets for the Ryan and Baldwin fund-raisers cost \$500 a person.

"It seems that everybody has a stake in this battle," said Danielle Doane of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. "It makes it harder to get any kind of bill through because you have people who have competing agendas."

Others argue that, unlike in the 1990s when President Bill Clinton made a failed stab at health care reform, the current political climate is ripe for change as people and businesses continue seeing their health care costs rise and an increasing number of Americans lose their health insurance.

"Today, no matter what the moneyed interest do, it will be risky (for members of Congress) not to deliver," said Judy Feder, a health care analyst with the Center for American Progress.

So far, large swaths of the industry haven't risen up against the current health care proposals and are working with lawmakers to craft legislation as beneficial as possible to their interests. And industry groups object to implications that their lobbying could undermine reform efforts.

"That kind of rhetoric is not productive," said Robert Zirkelbach, a spokesman for America's Health Insurance Plans, an industry group that opposes the idea of a government-run health insurance plan competing with private insurers.

His group also has been advocating for a government mandate that would require every American to buy health insurance - a measure that would significantly increase the number of potential insurance customers.

Other groups say their policy goals align well with the interests of health care consumers.

"Yes, we are a special interest," said Jim Kaufman, a lobbyist for the National Association of Children's Hospitals, which is advocating for higher reimbursement rates for doctors under the Medicaid program. "We're looking to protect health care for children."

Drug makers say they want to work with the government to control spending and shouldn't be blamed for rising health costs.

"Our biggest concern is that (health reform) won't happen," said Ken Johnson, a spokesman for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, which has been warning against drastic price cuts for medications that they say could discourage research into newer, better drugs.

But Levinthal and others worry that industry donations could help drown out the voices of average Americans in the debate. "The only people who don't have a powerful organized lobby are the actual consumers," he said.



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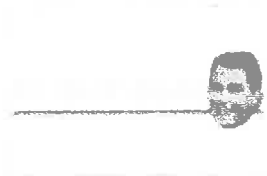
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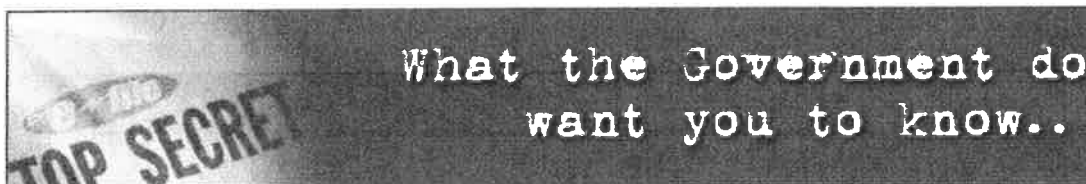


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Request to Speak**



Submit request to Clerk of Board (right of podium),
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SPEAKER'S NAME: Shirley Ferrante

Address: 4291 Monroe Street #81
(only if follow-up mail response requested)

City: Riverside **Zip:** 92504

Phone #: 951-500-7713

Date: 2/1/2010 **Agenda #** _____

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