

Thursday forum focuses on health-care reform (2.17.09)

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Thursday forum focuses on health-care reform Kagen to sit in on town hall meeting

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Two years ago she became involved with a health-care committee of ESTHER (Empowerment, Solidarity, Truth, Hope, Equality, Reform) of the Fox River Valley. The role required that she find local people willing to share stories about their struggles without health insurance coverage at public forums.

Thursday it will be her turn to take a seat in front when her group, in partnership with its Green Bay counterpart JOSHUA, holds a town hall meeting with U.S. Rep. Steve Kagen, D-Appleton.

"Ironic is a good word," said Raether, who loses her insurance at the end of the month because she has been laid off from her job of a nearly 20 years with Lutheran Social Services. "Our programs are primarily county supported, and of course you know what that's like right now. The counties don't have money."

The forum is part of a new approach the faith-based organization is taking to push for health-care reform with its parent group, Wisdom.

The state organization has a long history of advocating for policies on health care, immigrant rights and other key social issues and has signed on to a national campaign to pressure federal lawmakers to get to work on legislation.

The program, headed by JOSHUA, will include testimonies from Raether and 11 other Wisconsinites. "It's not hard to find these stories," said Stephanie Gyldenvand, a community organizer who is helping assemble the program.

Plans also are in the works to hold a similar meeting with U.S. Rep. Tom Petri, R-Fond du Lac.

Wisdom is working closely with Citizens Action of Wisconsin and Health Care for America Now.

The search for health-care coverage has been nothing short of complex even for someone with vast experience in services.

Insurance under COBRA is \$600 for Raether, 57, who says she also has applied for individual health insurance.

One of the policies, through WPS Health Insurance, would cost about \$188. There's one catch. Because she has arthritis on her left toe and goes to a chiropractor twice a year for right shoulder pain, WPS will not cover anything related to her toe or right shoulder for a year. It also will not cover anything related to arthritis or degenerative joint disease for the rest of her life.

"Do I take the policy for \$188 and hope that I never have issues with arthritis? I'm 57 years old. What's the likelihood?" she asked.