

A Volunteer Health Services Act update:

After seeing Wendell Potter on Bill Moyers Journal, I attended two Remote Area Medical expeditions this summer and did a piece on them for Huffington Post: [The Uninsured Line Up For Care In Rural Virginia](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-sullivan/the-uninsured-line-up-for-b_245705.html) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-sullivan/the-uninsured-line-up-for-b_245705.html . There were thousands of people camped in their cars waiting for care. The effort was at once inspiring and appalling.

I asked Stan Brock why RAM didn't come into North Carolina. He said a big reason is because we don't have what Tennessee has had since 1995, a Volunteer Health Care Services Act.

Why is that? As people who have organized political events, we know what it's like to have a large volunteer list and yet have trouble getting enough volunteers to show up at the same place, on the same day, at the same time, willing to do the right jobs, and in sufficient numbers to get those jobs done.

Stan had trouble getting sufficient help for RAM's week-long stint in August at the Forum in Los Angeles. In one of America's largest cities in the most populous state in the country, they couldn't get enough optometrists. Being able to draw from more than one state broadens the potential volunteer pool and makes it easier to mount a successful health expedition.

After major ice storms in Virginia or Ohio, you can watch lines of power company trucks headed north on I-95, I-77 and I-26 from Florida, South Carolina and Georgia. In a disaster, states don't shake down out-of-state first responders and ask for paperwork and licensing fees. And those guys get paid. But outside of natural disasters, states won't allow unpaid, volunteer physicians to do the same, even though duly licensed in their own states after passing the national boards.

We face a slow-motion medical disaster that our existing emergency response statutes do not cover. The Volunteer Health Care Services Act helps remedy that. I have been trading e-mails with RAM's Stan Brock and Randy Cresenzo, a regular RAM volunteer and attorney downstate in NC about fixing that. What we are attempting to do is promote and pass a NC Volunteer Health Care Services Act like Tennessee's. Think of it as "Doctors Within Borders."

It helps indigent patients receive free health care at no cost to taxpayers. No additional license or certificate is required for out-of-state licensed medical volunteers practicing at charity health fairs.

I spoke with the Democratic state senator from Oklahoma City who introduced a similar bill in Oklahoma this year. Sen. Andrew Rice is a 36 year-old Harvard Divinity School grad who looks like Matt Damon. He spent time working with NGOs in India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. His life took a turn towards politics after his brother was killed in the World Trade Center on 9/11. Although his bill did not survive intact, parts of it passed even in a red state like Oklahoma. They are planning a RAM event for Oklahoma City for next August. <http://www.andrewforoklahoma.com/>

At the Democrats' State Executive Committee meeting in Charlotte on Aug. 29, Sarah, some friends and I set up a display, distributed a one-sheet promoting the Act and collected signatures in support – 115 SEC members and elected officials (about 1/4 of the crowd). We got a great response. People spoke to Governor Bev Perdue about it. (RAM's next event is this weekend in Grundy, VA, the hometown of Gov. Perdue.)

We will be trying to build support in advance of the next session next May. To date, Rep. Susan Fisher has submitted the Tennessee bill to an NC House research committee and Sen. Phil Berger has done the same on the Senate side. Berger has raised the prospect of having Stan Brock appear before legislators in Raleigh, as Brock has done before in Washington.

This weekend I contacted one of the dentists – another RAM volunteer – who participated in the free Buncombe dental clinic last week. No reply yet. But I hope to enlist medical and dental societies between now and next spring. If you know someone in the NC Medical Society or the NC Pediatric Society, please contact me with their information.

This effort is not a substitute for real health care reform, but should we not get satisfaction from Washington, it is another way to build support for it while getting help for fellow Americans in desperate need. And it is not and cannot be specifically about RAM. As you've seen there are free health fairs sprouting up around the country.

Some bullet points:

- Thousands in NC could get care they otherwise couldn't afford and wouldn't receive
- Relieves cost burden on the state's health care system
- No cost to taxpayers
- Passage highlights the problems with our existing medical delivery system and increases pressure to move to a single-payer system.
- Shows "We Care"
- Shows we are "Yes We Can" leaders who can get something done -- even with no resources

Some short videos to explain further:

<http://video.newsweek.com/#?t=1711761255&l=1704094712>

http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/07312009/watch_excl.html

<http://videocafe.crooksandliars.com/heather/thousands-texans-attend-largest-free-health>

Links:

http://www.dailybreeze.com/opinions/ci_13231382

<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/hearings.asp?formmode=view&id=6864>