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## Amherst council backs single-payer health care



The Amherst Town Council this week approved a resolution endorsing single-payer health care. The town has twice passed similar resolutions when it had a Town Meeting form of government. The concept also won overwhelming support from residents in a nonbinding ballot vote five years ago. GAZETTE FILE PHOTO » Buy this Image

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AMHERST — Single-payer health care is being endorsed through an Amherst Town Council resolution, which follows similar resolutions that were twice passed by Amherst Town Meeting and a nonbinding ballot vote that earned nearly 90% support from town voters five years ago.

A “Resolution in Support of Acts Establishing Medicare for All for Massachusetts Residents” was adopted through the consent agenda by the Town Council on Monday.

The resolution supports the establishment of improved and expanded Medicare for All, an equitable system of universal health coverage for all Massachusetts residents, and calls on elected officials at the federal and state level “to work proactively to



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create a single payer system of universal health care that provides all Massachusetts residents with comprehensive health care coverage, including the freedom to choose doctors and other health care professionals, facilities and services.”

League of Women Voters member Diana Stein, a former Amherst Select Board member and health care activist, applauded the vote.

“People always ask me, ‘but how will we pay for universal healthcare,’” Stein said in a statement. “We’re paying for it already. We’re just not getting it.”

Stein observes that the United States spends more than twice as much as other developed countries for health care, yet life expectancy is the lowest among comparable countries, and has not rebounded after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In the United States, maternal and child mortality also continues to increase steeply, with Black mothers three times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts,” Stein said.

Amherst Town Meeting passed resolutions in 2000 and 2006. Then, in November 2018, 88% of Amherst voters gave their support to establishment of a system of single-payer health care. The latest vote means the Town Council is joining hundreds of other towns and cities around the country in Public Citizen’s grassroots campaign for Medicare for All.

At-Large Councilor Mandi Jo Hanneke said that universal health care could be a potential economic boost for Amherst.

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“The town budget may reap the savings from a single payer health care system for its employees that would allow the town to reallocate taxpayer money away from health insurance costs and into other programs, expenses, and investments for the town,” Hanneke said.

Data that supports significant savings from single payer health care has been provided by Gerald Friedman, a University of Massachusetts health economist and Amherst resident.

District 4 Councilor Pamela Rooney read the resolution that will go to members of Congress, including U.S. Sens. Edward Markey and Elizabeth Warren, and U.S. Rep. James McGovern, who are already on board with single-payer health care.

Rooney also thanked Barbara Pearson, who chairs the League’s Health Care Committee, for her work in putting together the resolution and language that could be adopted by the Town Council.

Also expressing gratitude for the Town Council vote was Anita Sarro, a nurse-lawyer living in South Amherst.

“There is a growing body of evidence showing how non-white populations suffer higher rates of illness and death under our current system of health care,” Sarro said. “Medicare for All would address that inequity by removing economic barriers. It is a fundamental social justice issue.”

The resolution will also go to President Biden and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Gov. Maura Healey, Sen. Jo Comerford, D-Northampton, and Reps. Mindy Domb, D-Amherst and Lindsay Sabadosa, D-Northampton.

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