



Senator McCain's Health Care Vote and Vincentian Grassroots Advocacy

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It will never be known for certain the impact that Vincentian Voice of the Poor grassroots advocacy might have played in convincing Arizona Senator John McCain to cast the deciding vote in the recent debate over the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the Senate, but it probably helped. And that Arizona Vincentian grassroots advocacy also highlights the way Vincentians can lead in these crucial public policy deliberations over fundamental social justice programs serving the poor and needy.

With their two senators – senior Senator McCain and junior Senator Jeff Flake -- Arizona Vincentians were particularly active in their grassroots advocacy. They visited Senate offices and met with staff, attended rallies, participated in a public forum at the Tucson Medical Center with physicians and healthcare experts showcasing the benefits of the ACA, and signed on to open letters published in local newspapers.

In Tucson, the SVdP Voice of the Poor and Out of Poverty teams joined forces with three other faith based groups – The Poverello House, a local homeless shelter, and Bread for the World – in a visit to Senator Flake's office where they stressed to the Senator's office director the tragic consequences they foresaw to the poor and vulnerable if the Affordable Care Act were to be repealed.



Not content with simply an office visit, Vincentians next headed to a health care rally with Sister Simone Campbell of [NETWORK](#) (the “nuns on the bus” Catholic social justice lobby based in Washington DC) at Tucson's St. Elizabeth's

Left: Sister Simone Campbell of Network speaking to a packed auditorium on June 28.
Below: Those who listened to the talk from the corridor, as the auditorium was filled. (Photos by Christine Krikliwy)

Health Center. It was packed -- standing room only! Vincentians had been specifically invited to participate as part of an inter-religious health care coalition in which the national Voice of the Poor Committee was participating along with about 35 other faith-based groups. In fact, Dan Torrington, West Region SVdP Voice of the Poor Leader, had been scheduled to speak if time allowed at the rally.

Sister Simone stated that the legislative health care proposals under consideration in Congress take money from the poor and give it to the rich, adding that the theory being advanced – that trickle-down economics will benefit all – does not in fact



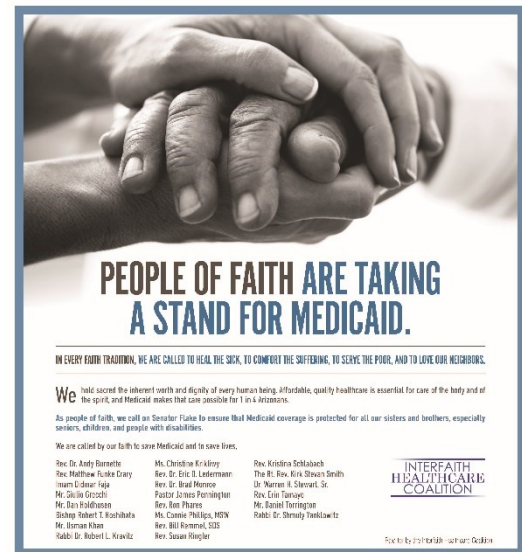
work, a message Pope Francis has also delivered.¹ Sister discussed the many benefits flowing to the poor and needy from the Affordable Care Act, and the dangers should it be modified without an adequate replacement.

After the rally, Arizona Voice of the Poor Vincentians took Sister Simone to dinner and the conversation continued.

A group of teenagers and young adult members of "Young Neighbors in Action" also attended the rally. They came from Massachusetts, Colorado and Michigan, eager to learn how poverty, hunger, healthcare and social issues affect our communities and how they in turn can transform the world and be transformed.

Three Arizona Vincentian leaders – Dan Torrington; Voice of the Poor Leader Christine Krikliwy; and Giulio Grecchi, former VOP Leader and now on the Out of Poverty systemic change team – also signed on with others in the Arizona interfaith community to an open letter published in the *Arizona Star* newspaper July 9, just a few short weeks before the start of a string of crucial votes in the Senate. The letter, directed at Senator Flake, asked him to protect Medicaid for the poor and needy in the upcoming vote. And though the Senator did not heed that call, his counterpart, Senator McCain certainly did.

After his crucial vote which captured the attention of the country, especially in light of his unexpected dramatic return to the Senate just after being diagnosed with brain cancer, Senator McCain offered words of advice. Though directed at his fellow senators, these words could well apply to all of us in this time of political polarization and upheaval.



"Let's trust each other. Let's return to regular order. We've been spinning our wheels on too many important issues. We're getting nothing done, my friends. We're getting nothing done. Our health care system is a mess; we all know it. Something has to be done...All we've managed to do is make more popular a policy that wasn't very popular when we started trying to get rid of it."

Vincentians in Ohio were similarly active at the grassroots level attempting to influence the vote of Senator Rob Portman, a legislator who it was thought might well vote against the repeal of the Affordable Care Act without a replacement. Ohio Vincentians signed an open newspaper letter as well, and participated with other faith-based groups in joint actions at the grassroots level designed to protect health care for the poor and needy.

Though legislative efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act now appear to be dead, the promising and most welcome news presently is that a bipartisan effort to improve the health care system appears poised to start in September when Congress returns to session. Nonetheless, threats remain. The Voice of the Poor Committee will continue to monitor coming legislation to ensure that it complies with the [Ten Commandments of Health Care Coverage](#), which the Society helped develop with NETWORK.

Join the Voice of the Poor Committee Saturday, September 2 at a "Trending on the Advocacy Front" workshop (11 a.m. to Noon) at the Tampa National Assembly to discuss the latest in the health care saga and other important social justice policy issues affecting the poor and vulnerable.

¹ From Pope Francis' Joy of the Gospel: "In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by the free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system." (Paragraph 54)

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