

Unions urge Franken to stop privatization of Medicare, Social Security

By Barb Kucera, [Workday Minnesota](#)

March 20, 2017

ST. PAUL

As part of an on-going campaign to stop the privatization of Medicare and Social Security, union and [Working America](#)([link is external](#)) members delivered petitions signed by several hundred Minnesotans to the St. Paul office of U.S. Senator Al Franken Monday.

“I hear every day from people who are counting on Social Security and Medicare to make ends meet,” said Jon Erik Haines, field manager for Working America, an organization of 3 million Americans who don’t have a union on the job.

Haines and other Working America members have been going door to door in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, talking to people about their concerns. Health care repeatedly comes up as a top priority, he said.

“People are worried – they’re scared” by the uncertainty being created as Congress debates eliminating the Affordable Care Act and enacting proposals to privatize Medicare and Social Security, Haines said. Last year, more than 900,000 Minnesotans benefited from Medicare and more than 94,000 people relied on Supplemental Security Income through Social Security.

Among other things, the health care legislation introduced by House Speaker Paul Ryan would weaken Medicare by diverting billions of dollars of funding to provide tax breaks for the wealthy and pharmaceutical corporations, according to the [AARP](#)([link is external](#)).

The [Minnesota Nurses Association](#)([link is external](#)), [AFSCME](#)([link is external](#)) and United Food & Commercial Workers Locals [653](#)([link is external](#)) and [1189](#)([link is external](#)) joined Working America in presenting the petitions to staff member Charles Sutton, who accepted them on behalf of Franken.

MNA President Mary Turner said her members are deeply concerned about the future of health care and retirement security in the United States.

“Without Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, people will die in the streets,” she said. “They will.”

Turner cited her experience this past weekend working as a Registered Nurse in the intensive care unit at North Memorial Medical Center in Robbinsdale. Five of the 13 beds in the ICU were filled by people with diabetes whose blood sugar had gotten out of control because they could not afford insulin or doctor visits.

Instead of getting the preventive care that would have been better for their health – and much less expensive – they were getting emergency care at the cost of \$10,000 to \$12,000 a day, Turner said.

Medicare and Medicaid need to be shored up – not torn apart and privatized, she said.

“I’m sharing right from the front line what I see happening,” she said.

Rena Wong, organizing director for UFCW Local 653, said privatization “impacts our members, but it also impacts all workers. The role of a union is to fight for all workers.”

Sutton said Franken has been meeting with people across the state to discuss their concerns about these issues.

“The Senator is going to continue to fight back against cuts to health care and Social Security,” he said. “We need to be protecting Minnesotans’ health care.”