



The Republican.

Woman, group head to forum

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@newhouse.com WASHINGTON - A Springfield, Mass., mother who made national news last month is slated to question presidential candidates about health care during a forum in America's heartland on Saturday.

Dedre Lewis will join about 24 members of the Alliance to Develop Power at the Iowa Heartland Presidential Forum in Des Moines. The alliance is a community-based organization headquartered in the South End of Springfield that works for better housing and economic opportunities.

Lewis has been selected to ask a question on health care, according to Caroline Murray, alliance executive director.

The health care worries about Lewis became nationally known last month when U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., revealed how Lewis had to reduce her work hours to take care of her grade-school daughter who has a rare eye disease. Her daughter, Alexsiana, needs expensive eye drops several times a day to prevent blindness. When Lewis reduced her hours, she lost her health insurance.

Kennedy spoke of the Springfield mother and her daughter during debate on the Senate floor when he argued - unsuccessfully - for the override of the president's veto of the State Children Health Insurance Program.

Before the forum on Saturday, Springfield resident Joel D. Rodriguez, a labor organizer with the alliance, will speak during a rally about the need for a living wage for working class families.

"We have a shared fate," Rodriguez said yesterday referring to workers covered by unions, those who are not as well as illegal immigrants. "American-born and non-American born need a living wage so that all families can live in dignity. The race to the bottom has to stop because an injury to one is an injury to all."

Alliance members from Springfield, Westfield, Greenfield, Holyoke, Amherst, Northampton and Easthampton are scheduled to attend the event.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for Western Massachusetts residents to get their issues heard on the national stage and addressed seriously by the Democratic candidates," Murray said. "Not many presidential candidates pass through our region while they are campaigning. By heading to Iowa, we can bring the voices of everyday people to their ears."

Presidential candidates expected to attend the forum include: U.S. Sen. Hillary R. Clinton, D-N.Y., U.S. Sen. Barack H. Obama, D-Ill., U.S. Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn., former U.S. Sen. John R. Edwards, D-N.C., and U.S. Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich, D-Ohio.

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