

10 years of work to make lives better

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Interfaith group says job not done

By James Vaznis, Globe Staff | May 28, 2008



What I came here to celebrate is the wonderful example you set for all of us," said Governor Deval Patrick (left), with House Speaker Salvatore F. DiMasi and Mayor Thomas M. Menino. (Patricia McDonnell for the Boston Globe)

More than 1,700 people clapped their hands, sang "Amen," and vowed to keep pushing for measures to improve people's lives at the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization's 10th anniversary celebration last night.

Organizers of the event - called "Shared Power, Shared Responsibility & Shared Sacrifice" - said it was the largest gathering of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Massachusetts since the days after the 2001 terrorist attacks.

"We will stay at the table until our job is done," said the Rev. Hurmon Hamilton, of Roxbury Presbyterian Church. "I think we can surely say the spirit of God is among us."

Much of the evening at a Boston University gymnasium was spent celebrating the group's success in expanding affordable housing, improving nursing homes, helping people manage debt, and pushing for passage of the state's mandatory health insurance law.

But they also looked to the work that lies ahead. Healthcare reform remains a top priority of the group, as it seeks to ensure stable long-term financing of the state's health insurance initiative as well as persuading some 30 percent of employers that are not currently offering health insurance to all employees to expand coverage.

Hamilton said that too many businesses, such as fast-food chain restaurants and some colleges, are skipping out on health insurance by keeping a certain percentage of employees as part-timers.

"Pay your fair share now," Hamilton demanded to a roaring crowd.

Other priorities include reducing youth violence and making the state's elder care Web and phone information system easier to use.

The nearly three-hour event drew Governor Deval Patrick, Mayor Thomas M. Menino, and House Speaker Salvatore F. DiMasi.

"What I came to celebrate is the wonderful example you set for all of us," Patrick said. "That's how we got healthcare reform."

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