

## Building Health Care For All!!

On Tuesday, more than two-thirds of Alameda County voters approved Measure A, a necessary emergency stopgap on the way to what we know we really need, adequate health care for everyone. Measure A will keep our public Emergency Rooms and clinics from shutting down. We all know they must not shut down, because that would just ramp up the health care hardship so many of us have to face. But we all also know that we need to do better -- a lot better -- than the emergency care we have. Measure A showed that Alameda County residents will sacrifice in order to do what the government won't—keep our emergency services open.

Not since its opening in 1927 has the county hospital, Highland Hospital, been so deep in debt. Why? Because we are living in a time where the social wealth of America is being soaked up by the rich. Bush just gave the rich the largest tax cut in history. Large businesses get all sorts of tax breaks, and the governor is doing his best to ensure that the rich are not bothered by pesky workmen's compensation and universal healthcare problems. While the rich make super profits on our backs, we are left paying for our hospitals to stay open. Is this morally sound public policy in a state that is the sixth largest economy in the world?

Measure A put a finger in the dike of the mounting healthcare crisis but the pressure is increasing. More people are uninsured (over 11 million Californians—35% of the state—went without healthcare in the last two years), insurance premiums are skyrocketing and employer-provided healthcare is disappearing all around the country. Reduced health benefits were a major reason for the 5-month Southern California grocery workers strike. In the 1990's alone, over 23 California hospitals closed and hospitals are battling closures in San Luis Obispo, Monterey and San Jose, among other places.

Californians need big solutions for big public policy problems. Tinkering on the edges will not give us the new priorities our public policy needs. Our present priorities bring diminished health care for homecare workers, AIDS patients, disabled people, and poor children. Seniors will still suffer from the privatization of Medicare and the 60 million plus working people who are uninsured will still gain no healthcare. There is no substitute for a universal healthcare system that eliminates profit from our health delivery system. As long as our health and our lives are seen as dollar signs and not signs of an inviolable humanity, justice will not be served.

Until every resident of the United States has healthcare we all are at risk. As Martin Luther King proposed in his final years, we must build a powerful movement in America to eliminate poverty and guarantee all of us our economic human rights to food, housing, healthcare, education and a living wage. The spirit of solidarity this past Tuesday was a powerful gesture of the people of Alameda County. We must build on that spirit because we know that Measure A was not the finish line for justice, it was a mile-post on the journey towards a more just society for all people. Because this is a national crisis we need a national response. Proposals like Just Health Care, a proposed national health insurance plan that would save and improve lives, should inform our actions. We had all better hurry and join in this fight, because the more voices we have calling for new public policy priorities, the sooner we can have them.

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