



Breaking news: Wildfires spur evacuations

Herger opposes Medicare bill - until it passes

By Record Searchlight staff
Sunday, July 6, 2008

Rep. Wally Herger got his tie caught in the legislative sausage-grinder.

In the week before the Independence Day recess, Herger was one of 57 Republicans in the House of Representatives to vote against a bill that would prevent 10.6 percent cuts in doctors' fees for treating Medicare patients. The bill passed by a lopsided, veto-proof margin with most Republicans and all Democrats behind it.

But in a subsequent letter to doctors who complained about his vote, and in a town-hall meeting Tuesday in Redding, the congressman said he'd now support the bill. Why? Because it passed.

Herger said of the bill: "We needed something that would pass, and that (bill) would not pass" -- or so he thought. Never mind that one way to help a bill pass is to vote for it.

The congressman can be forgiven for feeling a little whiplash. According to press reports, the House's Republican leadership urged a vote against the Medicare bill -- which was fiercely opposed by the insurance industry but supported by doctors and hospitals -- and President Bush said he'd veto it. But two-thirds of Republican representatives supported it anyway.

After facing the white-coated wrath of doctors, Herger wished he'd joined the majority.

This is no profile in political courage, but at least Herger is belatedly acknowledging a real threat to our medical system.

The Medicare cuts -- 10.6 percent on top of other cuts in recent years -- would squeeze hospitals and doctors, leaving some physicians to simply stop seeing patients covered by Medicare (that is, everyone over 65).

And in California, the medical system is facing severe cuts in the already rock-bottom state payments through Medi-Cal, which covers the poor.

Those with private insurance won't escape the contagion. When doctors leave the state, when clinics close, when hospitals end unsustainable services, everybody suffers.

The ever-increasing costs of health care are putting a heavy burden on business and government alike. But unilaterally slashing what a doctor is paid to treat a patient -- with no regard to the expense of care or to the long-term consequences -- is no way to fix a broken system.

Sham death penalty isn't worth the price

California has the death penalty on paper, but in reality the legal procedures to carry out an execution are so timeconsuming that far more of the condemned die of old age than in the execution chamber.

Yet still the state spends about \$137 million a year for a system that has executed only 14 inmates, including Shasta County multiple murderer Darrell Rich, since 1978. That puts the cost per execution north of \$250 million.

And a state commission report released last week says it would take \$100 million more for appellate lawyers and court resources to bring the pace of executions up to the national average while complying with the law.

Given their heinous crimes, the condemned have largely earned the death penalty.

But given the state's budget deficit, it's hard to justify spending hundreds of millions on a sham death-penalty system.

How about we end the Death Row charade and send the money saved to our beleaguered sheriff's departments?



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