

A Healthy Oregon

March 22, 2007

SB 329

Along with education, it is the issue that Oregonians care most about. KINK considers what the Oregon Legislature is doing about our health care crisis.

It's one of State Senator Alan Bates' favorite examples of waste. Bates, who is a doctor as well as a legislator, points to what's happening in Eugene. Eugene's biggest hospital is moving to Springfield at a cost of over a half billion dollars. It is moving almost next door to the Eugene area's second major hospital. Faced with competition in its backyard, the second hospital has decided to move to Eugene. Total cost of these hospitals basically switching places: 700-million-dollars. Meanwhile, pointing to another kind of health care inefficiency, Bates' colleague, Ben Westlund, notes that there are more M-R-I's in the Bend area than in all of western Canada. The lack of oversight and coordination of Oregon's health care providers is one reason that a health care cost crisis is facing Oregon employers and individuals. It's also one reason why 650-thousand Oregonians don't have health care insurance.

Bates and Westlund are working on legislation for universal health insurance coverage in Oregon. It includes creation of a state health management board that would manage a certificate-of-need program with teeth to oversee new health care building, programs, and technology. That board would also come up with a basic package of benefits that all Oregonians could access. Oregonians would no longer have to worry about losing coverage if we lose our jobs. It would also work to reduce inefficiency in our health insurance system where twenty-percent of our premiums go to administration. In more ways than one, this is vital legislation and it deserves the support of our legislators.

cc: state legislators from the metro area