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Murphys Area Residents Start the Dialogue about Health Care Crisis in Calaveras County

Saturday's health care SiCKO screening and forum offered participants a chance to watch a documentary and talk about ways county citizens cope with the escalating costs of health care and the challenges of staying healthy.

60 people attended the screening and forum, billed as a non-partisan event and sponsored by the Democratic Central Committee of Calaveras County. The audience included District IV Supervisor Tom Tryon, and Lee Seaton, Tryon's opponent in the upcoming District IV Supervisorial race. The second forum is slated for San Andreas at the Oak Shadows Mobile Home Park, beginning at 7pm. The event is free and all are welcome. Future screenings will be announced shortly in Arnold, Angels Camp, Copperopolis, Mokelumne Hill and Westpoint. Proceeds benefit the M.A.C.T. Health Care Board, Inc., operating low-cost clinics in Calaveras and surrounding counties.

Moviegoers munched freshly made popcorn and sipped apple juice during the two-hour documentary. Following the movie, participants took part in a 30 minute facilitated discussion, which remained remarkably clear of partisan bickering and candidate bashing.

The post-movie discussion began with a summary of the results of the anonymous survey handed out before the film began. Results indicate 20% of respondents have been declined coverage by their insurance company, 20% of respondents retold horror stories related to their insurance coverage and 50% leave the county to receive health care. The top change citizens wish for is access to more providers who will set up practice within the county limits. One of the top ways individuals stay healthy is through a diet and exercise combo.

Eighty percent of the participants who responded were in the 51-75 year age group with the remainder in the 75+ set. This group is largely assumed to have the best coverage given they retired before quality health care coverage was eliminated from corporate retirement packages and pensions, and yet the groups' stories indicate some are not receiving quality health care coverage.

During the discussion participants were asked to list the costs and benefits of staying healthy and costs and benefits of receiving health care coverage.

It may be too soon to tell if these opinions are reflective of the entire county population -- but survey results and the ensuing discussion indicate county leaders and state legislators should consider the following when setting policy:

- A majority of respondents focus on diet to stay healthy. To maintain their diet citizens need a place to shop for healthy food that's inexpensive.
- Citizens want to be free to choose their job or career based on their aspirations, not which employer has the best quality health care benefits.
- By lowering the cost to staying healthy, citizens will be happier, less depressed, contribute to society, and have less pain.
- If catastrophic illness or disease strikes, individuals should not be forced to choose between working overtime to pay excessive health care fees vs. spending time with loved ones and supporting their families.
- High health care insurance costs force local businesses to charge more for their products and services.
- Offering incentives that lure medical providers to our county might convince more aging boomers to retire here.

The discussion concluded with a brainstorming of ideas for solutions we could implement locally:

- A parcel tax or a health care district (similar to districts set up around California following WWII)
- Bike and pedestrian plan to promote healthy lifestyles
- Education – to keep people from giving in to the feeling they have little control over their health care options
- Support for alternative health care practitioners