

Murphys opens healthy dialogue

Group: Obama's health care proposal not a remedy

By **Dana M. Nichols**, Record Staff Writer

MURPHYS - President-elect Barack Obama appears to have a rebellion on his hands when it comes to his proposals for reforming health care.

The problem is Obama's proposals don't go far enough, and still rely on the insurance companies and employer-provided insurance that are at the root of U.S. health care woes, said more than two dozen people who gathered Monday at First Congregational Church in Murphys for a health care discussion. The results of that discussion are being transmitted to the Obama-Biden transition team.

"I don't think it should be the employer's role to provide health insurance," said Tami Chesnut, a registered nurse who collaborated with local Democratic Club leaders to organize the meeting in Murphys. The meeting was just one of hundreds held throughout the nation from Dec. 15 to today at the prompting of the Obama-Biden transition team.

Chesnut said putting the burden of paying for health insurance on employers puts those companies at a disadvantage as they try to compete with businesses in nations that have more efficient national health care systems.

Many people in the room said they want health care to be treated as a basic societywide service similar to law enforcement, rather than an optional product available only to those who can pay.

"Eliminate the profit motive from the health care system," suggested Addie Jacobson, a community activist in Murphys and the wife of physician Paul Jacobson. "We used to have a health care system, and now we have a medical business system."

Meegan Lucore told of the ordeal her family has suffered since her husband, horse trainer Shane Lucore, was kicked in the face in a 2006 accident. She said her insurer did not warn the family that it did not consider any of the surgeons in Calaveras or Tuolumne counties as part of its network.

"And so he was charged \$20,000 for a surgery," Meegan Lucore said. "I feel absolutely rooked. ... You shouldn't because you are sick or injured have to lose your life savings."

According to news accounts, people across the United States have expressed similar sentiments at

other health care discussions organized to provide input to the Obama-Biden transition team.

At one point during Monday's meeting in Murphys, retiree Dave Self complained about the agenda for the meeting suggested by the Obama-Biden transition team.

"They are pushing a set of questions to go their way," Self said. Self asked how many of the 27 participants in the room would prefer a single-payer health care system like those operating in Canada and Europe. All but one of those present raised their hands.

The only dissident, Billie McArthur, said she also would like to have health care available for all Americans, but she fears it would break the bank.

Others in the room immediately pointed out that other industrialized democracies with universal health care actually spend less per capita on health care than the United States. According to the Obama-Biden site, the U.S. spent \$412 per person on health care administration and insurance operations in 2003 - nearly six times as much as other developed countries.

According to the Obama-Biden Web site, the administration rejects both a completely government-run system and a system under which insurance companies operate without rules. The Obama-Biden proposal calls for expanding employer-provided insurance and establishing a national insurance exchange to allow individuals to buy affordable coverage.

The Obama-Biden plan relies on using existing health care providers. Those at Tuesday's meeting, however, say they don't want the insurance companies at the table deciding how to run things, and compared the health care disaster to the mortgage crisis and financial meltdown caused by private management of banks.

"If we go with this compromise, we are going to buy into the hard-right, everything-should-be-privatized world view," Self said. "Let's go for the single-payer revolution."

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(209) 607-1361
dnichols@recordnet.com