

LOCALS WILL STRUGGLE TO PAY BIG BILLS FOR HOSPITAL

Lane County residents and businesses already struggling to pay for rapidly increasing health care costs will be forced to bear the burden of PeaceHealth's decision to build a posh new half-billion-dollar hospital at RiverBend.

Health care experts, such as a report this year by the Center for Studying Health System Change, have long said that such expensive hospital projects are a prime driver in rapidly increasing health care costs.

Since 2001 the cost of health insurance has increased 78 percent while wages have remained largely stagnant. This year Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield announced a 26 percent rate hike on its Oregon insurance plans, and many other companies announced similar rate hikes. Now health insurance for a family costs about \$12,000 a year.

Many local people just can't afford it. One in five local residents are uninsured, according to a Lane County study.

The local United Way's 2007 survey of community needs makes no mention of the need for a new hospital with chandeliers, lush paneling, flat screen TVs, chandeliers, a multi-story stone fireplace and a "Northwest lodge feel"



that PeaceHealth built at RiverBend for \$567 million.

"The most severe problems experienced by households are related to paying for medical care and dental care," the United Way reported. More than 25 percent of households report problems paying medical bills.

The survey found that 9 percent of households couldn't afford health insurance for their children. Almost a third of households reported a person with a debilitating chronic medical condition and about a third of those households reported they couldn't afford needed medical care.

People can choose not to pay for the amenities at a ski-lodge by not going. But PeaceHealth has a near medical monopoly locally and people may face a choice of suffering or dying or paying for the hospital's "hotel-like amenities."

Meanwhile, the PeaceHealth "non-profit" corporation reported \$99 million in "excess" on its latest tax return on \$1.1 billion in revenue, a 9 percent profit margin. The local Sacred Heart Medical Center accounts for about two-thirds of the Bellevue-based corporation's profits.

PeaceHealth officials appear clueless that local people may not be able to afford the pricy new hospital they built. An extensive press kit from the hospital on the new facility makes no mention of affordability or the crisis in rising health care costs.

PeaceHealth CEO Alan Yordy makes \$1 million a year, with a flock of eight vice presidents earning \$400,000 to \$800,000 per year, according to the tax return. PeaceHealth doctors earn even higher salaries. The hospital reported paying one Eugene doctor \$1.7 million a year.

Meanwhile, the average local household income is about \$40,000 a year. Half of households around that income told the United Way survey they were having financial difficulty. — Alan Pittman

BALLOT TITLE PREPARED

Eugene's city attorney this week prepared ballot language for the proposed charter amendment that will go on the November ballot. The purpose of the amendment, proposed by Councilor Bonny Bettman, is to strengthen Eugene's city auditor function. The deadline to legally challenge the language in the measure is July 30.

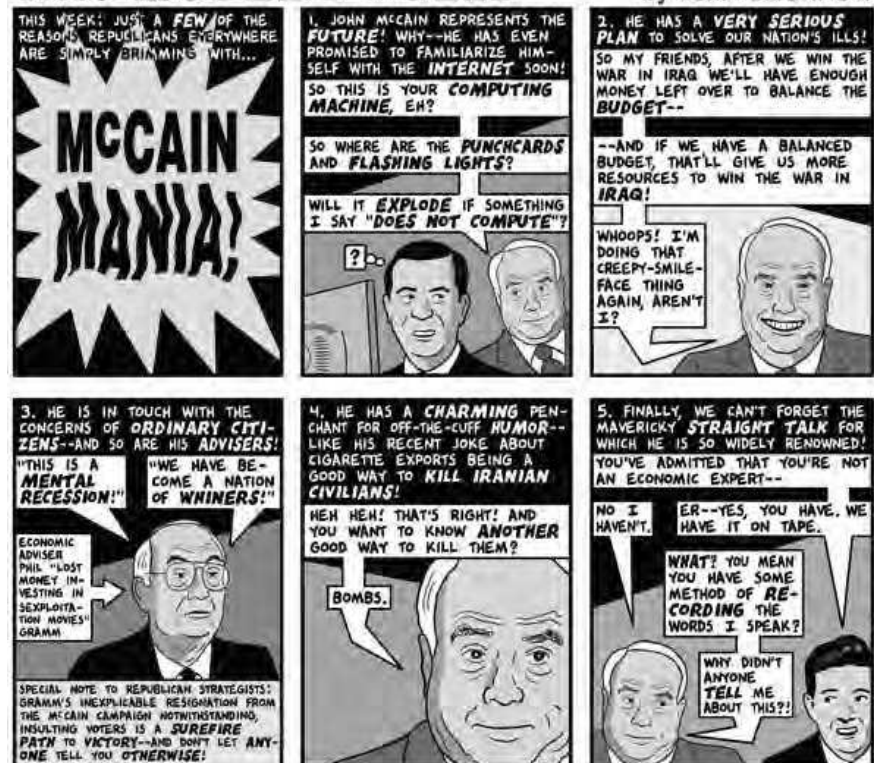
The caption for the measure is "Eugene Charter Amendment on External Review of Police." The question reads: "Shall Charter require, rather than allow, Council to appoint police auditor and review board, and to authorize duties and powers?"

The summary reads: "Section 15-A of the Eugene Charter currently allows, but does not require, the City Council to appoint an independent police auditor and a civilian review board. If the voters approve this measure, the Charter will require the City Council to appoint a police auditor and a civilian review board.

"Section 15-A also authorizes, but does not require, the City Council to grant to the police auditor and civilian review board certain powers and duties related to complaints of police misconduct and the administrative or criminal investigations of those complaints. ... If the voters approve this measure, the City Council will no longer have the discretion to determine which of these powers and duties will be granted. Instead, the City Council will be required to grant the specified powers and duties to the police auditor and civilian review board."

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

EUGENE SOLDIER GOES TO PRISON

Eugene soldier James Burmeister was given six months in prison during his Army court martial last week. Burmeister has been called a whistleblower for drawing attention to the military's bait-and-kill tactics using small kill teams in Iraq.

Unable to face the possibility he was killing innocent Iraqi civilians and troubled by injuries from a roadside bomb, Burmeister went AWOL last year, fleeing to Canada. He returned to the U.S. and has since lingered for four months at Fort Knox awaiting judgment.



Burmeister was charged with AWOL and desertion. According to reports from supporters present in the courtroom, the prosecution used media stories, including a PBS interview and an article in *The Oregonian* in which the AWOL Burmeister discussed the bait-and-kill tactics, as evidence against him.

Army desertions have been steadily rising for the past several years but actually being convicted of going AWOL or desertion is relatively rare. Of the 4,698 soldiers who were charged with desertion in 2007 (AWOL for more than a month) only 108 were actually convicted of the offence. Three hundred and ninety-five soldiers were convicted of the lesser charge of AWOL.

Charged with "desertion with intent to shirk important service," Burmeister pleaded guilty to AWOL to avoid a longer sentence.

In addition to his six-month prison sentence Burmeister will receive a reduction in rank and pay, and a bad conduct discharge. The bad conduct discharge means he will not have access to veterans benefits, including medical care for his post-traumatic stress disorder and head injury.

Burmeister's family had hoped he would be given a discharge in lieu of a court martial and return home to Oregon to help take care of his family. His mother, Helen

WAR DEAD

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003

(last week's numbers in parentheses):

- 4,125 U.S. troops killed* (4,119)
- 30,324 U.S. troops injured* (30,324)
- 145 U.S. military suicides* (145)
- 314 coalition troops killed** (314)
- 1,123 U.S. contractors killed (accurate updates NA)
- 93,880 to 1 million civilians killed*** (93,778)
- \$538.6 billion cost of war (\$536.6 billion)
- \$153.1 million cost to Eugene taxpayers (\$152.6 million)

* through July 21, 2008; source: icasualties.org; some figures only updated monthly ** estimate; source: icasualties.org *** highest estimate; source: iraqbodycount.org; based on confirmed media reports; other groups calculate civilian deaths as high as 655,000 to one million.