HEALTH CARE REFORM IN TROUBLE IN SENATE

Advocates for national single-payer health insurance or a public insurance option are rallying in Eugene this weekend as part of a national day of action organized by Democratic Party leader Howard Dean. The rally is to counter efforts to water down health care reform and maintain the health insurance industry's profit-motivated model for delivering health care services.

The Eugene rally begins at 11:30 am Saturday at the Free Speech Plaza at 8th and Oak, across from the Saturday Market, and the open microphone will be from 2:30 to 3:30 pm. Information tables will be set up and literature will be distributed. A rally is also planned at 10 am Saturday on the Capitol Steps in Salem, and some Eugeneans are planning to be at both events.

Conservatives in Congress, including some Democrats, are trying to kill Obama's public health insurance option, not by opposing it outright, but by pushing weak half-measures and calling them "public plans," according to Patrick Schmitt of MoveOn.org "The latest is a proposal for small, regional 'co-ops' that would have no chance of competing against insurance companies to bring costs down."

Schmitt says on the www.MoveOn.org website "If we act immediately, we have a good shot at defeating ploys like the 'co-op.' The key is to make it clear that we support a strong public health insurance option and lay out exactly what that means."

An overwhelming majority of Americans, about 83 percent, says Schmitt, supports a public health insurance option. MoveOn favors a "strong public health insurance option available to anyone who chooses to participate. If you like your current plan, you can keep it; if you want to participate in the public health insurance plan, you can choose that."

A conference call was held June 19 with members of Sen. Jeff Merkley's staff. Merkley is the junior member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, which is chaired by Sen. Edward Kennedy. Lane County health care reform advocate Rand Dawson participated in the call and says he was disappointed with what he heard. He says few opportunities were provided for questions from callers.

"The thrust (of the call) was to provide a sketchy outline of what the staffer said ultimately would be over 600 pages of detailed tweaking of current delivery and financing mechanisms," says Dawson.

In the HELP bill right now, says Dawson, "The current fragmented private insurance system remains intact with many of its underwriting prerogatives. Some limits may be placed on such items as pre-existing conditions or current health status. But 'age' rating will be allowed. So imagine the differing rate structures for older folks."

Dawson says there was "no mention of how we can afford to continue the insurance industry's high administrative overhead — particularly since they will continue to exert underwriting capability."

Back in mid-May, *EW* asked Merkley to clarify his position on single-payer. "Sen. Merkley believes there are many merits to a single-payer system and will vote for single-payer if it comes to the Senate floor," said his communications director, Julie Edwards. "However, he understands that it will be difficult to enact such legislation. That is why he is strongly pushing for the inclusion of a single-payer option, such as an extension of Medicare, in the Senate health care reform bill. Every American should be able to choose whether they would prefer public or private coverage. A public option would provide competition to keep private insurance companies honest and lower costs, and help ensure affordable health care for every American."

Dawson says the HELP Committee's openness to single-payer options is stronger than the Senate Finance Committee, which has "even greater issues with 'public plan' concepts than the Senate HELP committee." The Finance Committee is expected to reveal its health care bill this week.

The monthly joint meeting of the local chapters of Health Care For All-Oregon and the Archimedes Movement will be from 6:30 to 8 pm Wednesday, July 1, at the EWEB Community Room. Updates will be provided on legislation in Congress and in Oregon. For more information, call 953-0148. — *Ted Taylor*

Lane Area Herbicide Spray Schedule

• Weyerhaeuser Company (746-2511) will spray **300 miles of forestry roads and roadsides** in western Lane and Douglas Counties from Gillespie Corners to Drain, and 400 miles in Eastern Lane County forestry districts with six herbicides plus surfactants as close as within 10 feet of domestic water supply streams and fish streams starting June 29 (Notice No. 781-50322 Western and 771-55409 Eastern Lane).

• **Gypsy moth spraying** (southeast Eugene): For assistance with Report of Loss forms contact Lisa Warnes, VP of the SE Neighbors Association, at 484-2210.

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news Briefs

FROM PITS TO PARKLAND

A tragedy has become a place of beauty where children can play safely, thanks to the families and friends who lost their own children. There will be a dedication ceremony for the new Golden Gardens Park beginning at 5 pm on Thursday, June 25.

On Father's Day 2005, cousins Nick Davis,14, and Britton Shephard-Davis, 15, drowned in the deep water-filled pits near Golden Gardens Street in northwest Eugene. The family and friends have worked to turn the dangerous "pits" into safe park.

The 146-acre Golden Gardens Park was once a "borrow pit" from which gravel was taken to be gravel for the construction of Beltline Road. The steep-sided water-filled pits, brushy undergrowth and obstructed access made the area dangerous to local kids who played there. In addition to the Davis cousins, at least two other drownings have happened in the pits since 1990.

But the Davis family, their neighbors and the boys' schoolmates turned the tragedy into a new beginning. The Bethel community formed the informal group Friends of Golden Gardens Park and raised awareness about the area. Thanks to their work over the last four years, Eugene Parks and Open Space dedicated $50,000 from the parks' budget to build an emergency-access bridge, and the City Council allocated $600,000 in emergency funds to re-slope the ponds' banks, making them less steep and less difficult to climb out of. A 2006 $1.4 million bond measure paid for the rest of the improvements, which include a longer path, better wildlife habitat, planning of native trees, shrubs and grasses, as well as other safety improvements.

In an email to the *EW*, Patricia Haney, the grandmother of Nick Davis wrote, "This is an important example of citizen concern and involvement in trying to make sense of two senseless deaths."

She writes, "I may be presuming a lot, but I am calling this the 'Nick and Brittan Davis Memorial Park.' This is how I will think of the new park and I sincerely hope this will help my grandson Nick's wonderful, brave and valiant family find some sense of justice in his untimely and preventable death." — *Camilla Mortensen*

WAR DEAD

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003
(last week's numbers in parentheses):

In Iraq

- **4,315 U.S. troops killed*** (4,312)
- **31,354 U.S. troops injured*** (31,342)
- **185 U.S. military suicides**** (185)
- **1,123 U.S. contractors killed** (accurate updates NA)
- **100,867 to 1.2 million civilians killed***** (100,820)
- **$680.5 billion cost of war** ($678.4 billion)
- **$193.5 million cost to Eugene taxpayers** ($192.9 million)

In Afganistan

- **712 U.S. troops killed*** (704)
- **3,023 U.S. troops injured*** (2,979)
- **$190.6 billion cost of war** ($190.1 million)
- **$54.2 million cost to Eugene taxpayers** ($54.1 million)

** through June 22, 2009; source: icasualties.org; some figures only updated monthly*
*** sources: icasualties.org, defenselink.mil*
**** highest estimate; source: iraqbodycount.org; based on confirmed media reports; other groups calculate civilian deaths as high as 655,000 (Lancet survey, 2006) to 1.1 million (Opinion Research Business survey, 2008)*

FIXING THE INEQUITIES

Corporations are responsible for only 6 percent of Oregon's General Fund revenue, while Oregon families pay the other 94 percent, says Rep. Phil Barnhart in his "Legislative Report" this week. Two-thirds of the corporations in Oregon pay the $10 minimum tax which has not been increased since 1931.

Barnhart is chair of the House Revenue Committee, and says he has spent "a significant portion of my time this session working with colleagues and stakeholders to develop a supplemental revenue package to help ease the pain of cuts to services for our most vulnerable citizens." He says HB 3405 and HB 2649 would raise $733 million "through judicious and fair tax increases on corporations and the wealthiest 2.5 percent of taxpayers."

HB 3405 increases the minimum tax to $150 for all businesses and implements graduated increases on C-corporations with Oregon sales higher than $500,000. The bill also increases the tax rate on profits above $250,000 by 1.3 percent for the