Success and Potential for more accountability

The Oregon Senate passed a number of bills to make health care more affordable. Two of these became law:

- ▲ legislation to force insurance companies to cover mental health issues the same as treatment for physical ailments (Senate Bill1)
- ▲ a bill to require the health insurance industry to disclose how much they pay for medical care and how much they pay for CEO salaries, overhead, and advertising (SB 501)

A number of key bills passed the Senate and failed in the Republican-controlled House:

- ▲ a bill to make prescription drugs cheaper for Oregonians through expansion of the state purchasing pool (SB 329)
- ▲ a bill to force hospitals to explain their pricing structures to stop rip-offs from greedy hospital corporations (SB 1040)

All Democrats in the Senate voted for each of these bills. The Senate Democrats had unity on these issues, while several of these bills had only one or two Republicans voting in favor.

SPECIAL INTERESTS TRIED TO RULE THE DAY

We had started the session hopeful that we could get a tight and strong package quickly passed through the Democrat-controlled Senate. Instead the bills took much longer than expected and were weaker than we had hoped when they emerged from the Senate. The power of the drug companies, hospital corporations, and the insurance industry is extreme. Even our allies in the legislature were squeezed hard to cave to the powerful special interests. Several key Senators were afraid to commit to us in advance of the vote that they would stand up to the health care industry.

By the end of the session, our health care package had made it through the Senate. Eighteen to twenty Senators stood tough on the floor. The challenge that we faced was the unwillingness of several Senators to commit to us in advance of the vote that working families could count on their support. Compromises were made to build the majority needed to pass the bills through the Senate. Part of this is the normal legislative