

# EDITORIAL

The Portland Observer

## perspective's Health Plans: Another Year Of Uncertainty?

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

When it was said that "the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray," it was part of the dialogue of a novel by John Steinbeck ("Of Mice And Men"). Today that memorable line provokes a reasonable expectation that it may be applied to the Clinton(s) health initiative, given all its uncertainties, converge, insurable and funding. That novel went from Broadway to Hollywood to world wide acclaim; how far will "The Plan" go?

The state of Oregon has carved itself a definite niche in the evolution of American health plans. Meeting head on with the realization that there are only so many health care dollars, it was decided to prioritize a list of 696 medical conditions," the devil take the hindmost" as the old saying went. Well, that attitude drew some favorable comments around the nation, but not from the administration. Politicians, it would seem, always have difficulty dealing with reality (except, of course, in situations such as raises and perks).

The Clinton gang has recoiled in horror from such a "wide-open, fish bowl process" as a Princeton economist puts it. Evading decision-making and responsibility, they say "we give you a global budget and 'you' decide what kind of care you're going to give. And if there has to be rationing' you do it in the privacy of the

HMO, using 'your' best medical judgment." Well, you might say, "so much for the expectations of many Oregonians (both 'mice and men')." But then we have the very strong opinions of people like Dr. Paul Kirk of Oregon Health Sciences University who believes that "sooner or later national health planners will have to grapple with the Oregon question: which are the more important health care services?"

Another area of a very uncertain developmental stage in this health care process is the treatment of the "small employer". And, again, Oregon is receiving nationwide attention in its effort to devise a plan affordable to the employer, yet providing substantial coverage to the employee. Preliminary information released by a Washington "think tank" (Rand Corp.) indicated that small Oregon employers get less health insurance for their dollars than do large ones. This is of great concern to them as the administration sways back and forth on the issue of "at what work force levels shall there be mandatory requirements?"

The Rand study conclusion reinforces the common notion that small employers in Oregon would gain from the increased buying power of contemplated large insurance purchasing combines. Earlier this year, I wrote on this issue and other health care prob-

lems in the state. Many more remain, for instance, Gov. Roberts is on the hot seat again as she seeks defend recent increases in health insurance benefits the state has agreed to pay two unions: The American Federation of state, County and Municipal Employees (8.5) and the Oregon Public Employees union (avg. 4%). Cost increases were much less!

The 'backdoor' wage increase has provoked a storm of criticism, not only from taxpayers who voted down a sales tax as the governor was accused of failing to make promised cuts in the cost of government -- but from state employees who were not members of those unions and felt they did not get a fair share of the wealth Management Employees, Nurses Association). Additionally, there is lingering resentment on the part of many taxpayers because the Public employees get all of their health and dental coverage paid by the state (in lieu of a raise in pay during the 1970s). Attempts to rescind this perk are underway; quite a battle is anticipated.

Another area where the administration is seen to be a little fuzzy and uncertain is the degree of emphasis (and funding) on Drug and Alcohol Education. It is difficult to imagine a higher "health priority". You cannot ration the future of America! To all my readers for the New Year(s) to come, "Learn to love and love to learn".

## "Youth Violence And Gangsta RAP"

I was sitting in my study, and the music from the bedroom of my younger daughter, Sojourner, descended down the steps. Over the dull hum of my electric typewriter, I could hear the menacing words of the popular rap artist Dr. Dre: "Rat-a-tat and a tat like that/ Never hesitate to put a nigger on his back." In other words the lyric urged young African Americans to murder each other.

That's exactly what's happening to our young people throughout America. "Gangsta rap" -- Snoop Doggy Dogg, Dr. Dre and company -- only articulate the epidemic of violence in our streets, schools and neighborhoods. In predominately-black Washington, D.C., for example, in a three year period (1988-1990), the number of juvenile homicide arrests nearly tripled. Within elements of the popular culture of our young people, there is a dangerous glorification of violence.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, there are

more than 280 million guns in America; 2.5 million were purchased last year alone. This is the central reason why firearms are the leading cause of death for black men between 15 to 24 years. Over the next six years, more black men will be murdered by other black men than the total number of American troops killed in Vietnam. That's nothing short of a war.

But this proliferation of violence is not just a black phenomenon--it affects whites, Latinos, Asian-Americans and others. The number of juvenile murders has almost doubled over the past decade, and the rate of juvenile violent crime rose during the same time by over 40 percent. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, a Pittsburgh based research institute, the murder arrest rate among all children between the ages of ten and seventeen more than doubled, from 5.4 arrests per 100,000 to 12.7 per 100,000. In 1991, 5,356 young people under age 19 were killed by firearms, or nearly fifteen each day.

Thousands more are wounded by firearms.

What are the economic costs for this epidemic of violence? According to the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions, it costs more than \$14,400 to treat each child struck down by gunfire as of 1991. That's more than what it costs to pay for tuition at a typical four-year private college. That's hundreds of millions of dollars--not counting the emotional and social devastation to tens of thousands of families.

Our federal and state governments have responded to this crisis by addressing the symptoms, rather than the root causes, of youth violence. Last month, the Senate passed a crime bill providing \$8.9 billion for one hundred thousand new police officers over the next five years. The Senate bill extended the death penalty to cover fifty-two new offenses. At the state level, the laws have been



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Volunteers from the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA), Oregon-Columbia chapter and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48 donated time and materials to wire the light extravaganza for this year's

Christmas festival at The Grotto.

This is the sixth consecutive year that The Grotto has featured the Festival of Lights, and the number of lights has more than doubled from the original 25,000. This year's festival introduces three new lighting displays

that involve animation and fiber-optics, and enhance the "Peace On Earth" theme.

The 28 volunteers from Local 48 devoted their Saturday, prior to Thanksgiving, providing the electrical work needed to generate temporary power for over 50,000 lights, which are incorporated into the new thematic displays as well as the lighted angels that cover a 110-foot cliff in the gardens of The Grotto. "This event could not happen without these electricians," said Peter Mott, Event Coordinator at The Grotto. "I would be at a total loss without them."

In conjunction with the electricians who volunteer their time, NECA member electrical contractors donate supplies and work vans. "Since The Grotto is a non-profit organization, maintained primarily by visitor donations, the contribution of electrical materials is essential to the success of building the displays," added Mott. The three NECA contractors who contributed this year are: Rose City Electric, who has been involved every year since 1988; Cochran/Broadway Electric, who has contributed for the past two years; and Capitol Electric, who joined the team this year.

"We are proud to be involved in such a spectacular holiday display that is enjoyed by so many people in the community," said Ed Barnes, Business Manager of IBEW Local 48. According to Mott, this year's attendance is expected to be approximately 45,000.

### College Admitting Standards Changes Proposed

A fundamental shift in how colleges admit students is under way in Oregon.

The state's higher education system is designing admissions standards that would judge students on what they know - not on high school courses completed. Such a shift fits well with the state's plan to make a similar shift in high school graduation requirements.

The higher education plan was outlined at last week's state Board of Education meeting by David Conley, a University of Oregon professor who is directing the admissions standards project.

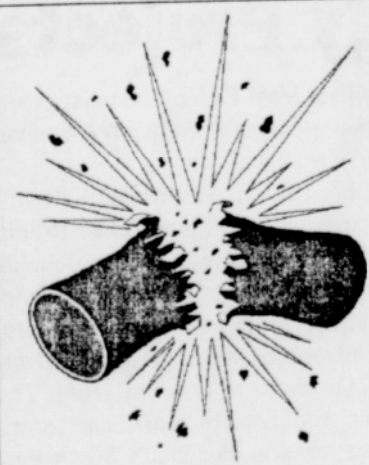
The project is developing a list of what students must know and be able to do to get into college. Under the new requirements, envisioned for 1998, it will no longer matter what courses students take.

Students will be required to show they can read and write well rather than just prove they've taken four years of English. The level of skill and knowledge students must demonstrate will be determined by performance standards.

So far, the project committee has decided students should be proficient in mathematics, science, social sciences and foreign language, humanities and literature and fine and performing arts.

They also must have skills in reading, writing, speaking, critical and integrative thinking, problem-solving, teamwork and technology.

The goal is to match college admissions standards with those the state is developing for high school graduation, Conley told the board.



# Happy New Year

From  
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## THE MESSAGE AND MEANING OF KWANZAA

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

This year we have seen the further growth of the holiday of Kwanzaa. It grows among African people in the U.S., in Africa, Brazil and other countries of South America, in Canada, in the Caribbean, in Britain and other European countries and now this year in India. Kwanzaa grows among African people because it speaks to their need and appreciation for its cultural vision and life-affirming values, values which celebrate and reinforce family, community and culture. It grows because it represents an important way Africans speak their own special cultural truth in a multicultural world. It grows because it reaffirms a rich and most ancient tradition which lays claim to the first religious, ethical and scientific texts, and the introduction of the basic disciplines of human knowledge in the Nile Valley. It grows because it reinforces our rootedness in our own culture in a rich and meaningful way. And it grows be-

cause it brings us together from all countries, all religious traditions, all classes, all ages and generations, and all political persuasions on the common ground of our Africanness in all its historical and current diversity and unity.

The vision and values of Kwanzaa revolve around the practice of five fundamental activities which celebrate and reinforce family, community and culture. First, Kwanzaa is a time of gathering of the people, the rich and various human harvests. It is, then, a time to come together and reinforce the bonds between us as a people in spite of our diversity. Thus, Africans who are Muslim, Christian, Jew (Hebrew), followers of the ancient African traditions of Yoruba, Maat, Dogon, Ashanti, Dinka and other religious traditions celebrate Kwanzaa. For it is a cultural holiday not a religious one. Indeed

African culture is diverse and the home of innumerable religious traditions. Likewise, old and young reach across generations and embrace and find in Kwanzaa a common ground of heritage and promise.

Secondly, Kwanzaa is a time of special reverence for the Creator and the creation. It is, then, a time of thanksgiving for the good in life, for life itself, for love, for friendship, for parents and children, the elders and youth, man and woman, and for family, community and culture. As a harvest celebration, Kwanzaa is also a time of thanksgiving for the earth and all that is on it, humans, birds, animals, plants and all living things, water, air, land and all natural resources. Thus, Kwanzaa is also a time for moral commitment to honor the Creator by honoring the creation and are committing ourselves to respect and preserve it.

Thirdly, Kwanzaa is a time of

commemoration of the past. It is, then, a time of honoring the moral obligation to remember and praise those on whose shoulders we stand, to raise and praise the names of those who gave their lives that we might live fuller and more meaningful ones. It is also a time to appreciate our role as "heirs and custodians of a great legacy" and to recommit ourselves to honoring it by preserving it and expanding it. We are, as African people, fathers and mothers of humanity and human civilization, sons and daughters of the Holocaust of Enslavement and authors and heirs of the reaffirmation of our Africanness in the 60's. Each period leaves a legacy of challenge, struggle and achievement. We honor each by learning it and living it.

Fourthly, Kwanzaa is a time of commitment to our highest ideals. It is, then, a time of focusing on thought and practice of our highest cultural vision and values which in

essence are ethical values -- values of love, sisterhood, brotherhood, respect for the transcendent, the human person, for elders and nature. It is here that the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles) serve as the central focus of Kwanzaa in thought and practice. These communitarian values which are both cultural and ethical are: Umoja (Unity); Kujichagulia (Self-Determination); Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility); Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics); Nia (Purpose); Kuumba (Creativity) and Imani (Faith).

We are, in the final analysis, defined by our values and the practice to which they lead. It is for this reason at Kwanzaa that we should remember and act on the ancient African teachings of Maat which say "Speak truth, do justice and walk in the way of righteousness." Likewise in speaking truth and doing justice, the Husia says we must always show preference for the most vulnerable among us.

Thus, we must, the texts say, "Give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked and a boat to those without one." Moreover, we must be "a father to the orphan, a husband to the widow, comfort to the sick and a staff of support for the aged, a shelter to the needy, a float for the drowning and a ladder for those trapped in the pit."

Finally, Kwanzaa is a time for celebration of the good, the good of life, family, community culture, friendship, the bountifulness of earth, the wonder of the universe, the elder, the young, the human person in general, our history, our struggle for liberation and ever higher levels of human life. Celebration is a ceremony, commemoration, a respectful marking, an honoring, a praising and a rejoicing. This and more is our holiday of Kwanzaa which is both ancient and modern thought and practice, a joyful achievement and an ongoing and unending promise.