

The need for health care reform is urgent

East County Times

Posted: 03/17/2010 01:49:15 PM PDT

Updated: 03/18/2010 06:08:53 AM PDT

LAST YEAR the Contra Costa Health Services Department was directed to cut more than \$15 million from its budget which resulted in a decrease in health care access across our county. According to John Goia, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, this year's budget is not going to be a "pretty picture" either, as the county expects more devastating cuts to health and social services.

Our county's situation clearly demonstrates the urgent need for national health care reform. Thousands of people are unemployed, and even those who are employed, cannot afford quality health care. This matter is ever so urgent! Unfortunately, illness does not respect partisan lines nor will it cease to impact people's lives while Congress figures this out. I assure you that while President Obama and congressional leadership from both sides of the aisle discussed reform during the recent health care summit, people became ill, more people realized they were under insured, others continued to put off preventive care for lack of coverage, and some may have even died. Between 1994 and today, approximately 650,000 people have died prematurely in the United States because they lacked health coverage. Who knows how many millions more could face this same fate if reform fails.

Without reform, health costs will continue to grow much faster than wages. Without reform, many millions of hardworking people and their families will join the ranks

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of the uninsured and underinsured. And without reform, businesses, staggered by increasing employee health costs, will either drop coverage or will be unable to make needed investments.

Now, more than ever, Congress needs to realize that the time to pass affordable and accessible health care is now. Incremental steps taken in the past have simply not been sufficient. Anyone who's visited an emergency room recently and experienced a long wait or who's seen his health care premiums increase knows this is the case.

Health care reform has been an unmet imperative for millions of families for much too long. If Congress can't do this for the right reasons, to save lives and improve the welfare of the citizenry, then they need to do it for political expediency. No one is going to vote for politicians who are weak, ineffective and lack the fortitude to carry through on their core values.

Lastly, we'd like to thank our representatives, Congressmen George Miller and John Garamendi, for their continued support and for taking a strong stance on this issue and call on the entire Congress to do the same.

Anne Snyder is president of the CCISCO board of directors and an active member of St. Joseph's Local Organizing Committee in Pinole. Violeta Tapia is an active member of St. Anthony's Local Organizing Committee and a resident of Oakley.