

Mountain Democrat

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My Turn: Continuing California's effort to protect access to healthcare coverage

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The 2016 election is behind us. America will inaugurate a new president and the federal government will transition to one-party control of the legislative and executive branches of government.

That power transfer means we are headed for changes to federal healthcare laws. We don't know what those changes will look like at this point. While the uncertainty and political debate may cause uneasiness, we believe this is a prime opportunity to reaffirm a top priority: that Californians maintain access to quality, affordable coverage.

California is unlike any other state in America. We have the largest population and 3.7 million people have joined the ranks of the insured over the last few years under healthcare reform. This expansion of coverage has

benefitted people of all ages, incomes and circumstances.

The ability to take advantage of preventative treatment, immunizations, examinations and other types of care results in a healthier, more productive population. Similarly, when illness or accident strikes people aren't foregoing treatment, they're benefiting from it. As a result, employees stay on the job instead of calling in sick, students attend and thrive in school and seniors are better able to deal with chronic conditions. Financially, being able to prevent illness is much less expensive than having to treat it, not to mention the greater good of our population having healthy lives versus suffering with pain and illness.

Hospitals will serve anyone who needs immediate care, regardless of their ability to

pay. That's why the societal cost of treating the uninsured is much greater than helping low-income families enroll in and be covered by Medi-Cal, the state version of Medicaid. It's not only the right thing to do, taxpayers win too.

While there may be political disagreement about the structure of America's healthcare system, we're certain that our new president and representatives in Washington, D.C., are unified in a commitment to ensuring that, whatever changes may be enacted, they build on what is working.

Locally, tens of thousands of people have benefitted from the ability to enroll in Medi-Cal. Half of the enrollees are children and federal funding has helped local hospitals, including Sutter Amador Hospital, Mark Twain Medical Center, Barton Memorial, Marshall Medical

Center, Sutter Roseville and Kaiser Foundation Hospital in Roseville. Targeted funding to provide coverage for these people has been invaluable, demonstrating that combining coverage and care will increase a community's health and well-being.

California has made great progress in recent years and we must acknowledge the efforts of our local representatives who have worked with us to promote the benefits of access to care. It's a true win-win situation.

With that in mind, as a new Congress and president are sworn into office, we are eager to work with our representatives to address federal health care policy. Our focus is to make sure that our work to reduce the number of uninsured seniors, children and families is preserved and that we can continue the effort to keep people healthy and to provide the best care possible. We have high hopes our new president and representatives will improve our healthcare system for all the population we serve.

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