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Let's Preserve the Central Valley's Road to Health Care Coverage

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California is entering 2017 with a brighter and healthier landscape. Thanks to health care reform, millions more residents enjoy access to safe and affordable health care, a privilege many are experiencing for the first time. But what lies ahead as a new president prepares to take office? There is still much uncertainty, but as the CEO/Administrator of the Coalinga Regional Medical Center, and the City Manager of the City of Coalinga, we hope expanded health care coverage remains a big part of the agenda.

As the most populous state in the U.S., California has benefitted greatly from health care reform. According to data from the Department of Health Care services, an estimated 3.7 million children, seniors and individuals in low-income working families have gained access to affordable, high quality health care programs and services. The state's

Medi-Cal population, California's version of Medicaid, has grown 75 percent to more than 13 million, or a third of the state's population, since the expansion.

This is important for hard-working Central Valley families who live in a region with serious health challenges. Thanks to support from Washington, D.C., children have access to preventative care, helping them to improve their health and raise their rates of school attendance. This means better grades, a stronger knowledge base and a higher chance of graduating from high school and moving onto higher education.

Many adults had trouble finding coverage because of conditions like asthma, something that affects hundreds of thousands in the Central Valley. Now those patients are able to enroll in cost-effective plans that

provide the access to care and medication needed to thrive. In turn, employees remain healthier on the job, adding to a more productive workforce.

Expanded health care coverage has also provided a stronger safety net of care for the state's senior population. Preventative care is helping to spot and treat preventable diseases, emphasizing the importance of reducing costly trips to emergency rooms while also enhancing quality of life.

Health care reform has been especially effective in California's rural communities, including those in the Central Valley. In Kern, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties, more than 350,000 Californians, half of them children, have gained access to health coverage through Medi-Cal thanks to health care reform. Facilities such as Coalinga Regional Medical Center, Delano Regional Medical Center, Central

Valley General Hospital and Adventist Medical Center in Hanford are better able to serve their communities due to funding available through these reform efforts.

The benefits of health care reform delivered to California's diverse population of more than 39 million people can be seen in one of the strongest economies in the world. Access to care means investment in the state's future prosperity. As the discussions over policy take shape in Washington, D.C., it is important to ensure that millions of vulnerable Californians do not lose their access to health care.

As the transition to a new administration continues, we believe our elected leaders in Congress share our goals of ensuring California families have access to coverage. We have made great headway in serving the best interests of the public and patients. We believe that protecting this progress is vital to preserving a bright future for California.

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