

Leno Bill Addresses California's Health Care Crisis

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

California Universal Health Care Act of 2009 guarantees comprehensive benefits to every Californian and provides savings for businesses, government and consumers

SACRAMENTO – Senator Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) announced today the reintroduction of legislation that would provide all Californians with universal health care. The California Universal Health Care Act of 2009 would guarantee comprehensive health care benefits to every California resident and streamline claims and reimbursements, which will save billions of dollars in health care administrative costs. Under Senate Bill 810, every Californian would have medical, dental, vision, hospitalization and prescription drug benefits. The bill also preserves a patient's right to choose his or her own doctors and hospitals.

"As a nation, we spend twice as much per person on health care as other wealthy countries, with the hope that our families will be protected from illnesses, yet most insured Americans still worry about how they will afford critical care if they become sick," said Senator Leno. "In California, 7 million people do not have health insurance. Wasteful health care spending is crushing our economy and forcing families to forego basic medical care. With the money we spend today on health care, California can have a modern, universal health care system that provides high quality care for everyone," he said.

The California Universal Health Care Act of 2009 would invest in modern technologies and infrastructure that improve care and reduce costs. The plan would emphasize prevention and primary health care, dramatically reduce administrative waste and utilize California's purchasing power to realize savings on prescriptions and medical equipment.

"Reforms that leave insurance companies at the apex of power, or expand their reach, will betray the yearnings of Californians for real solutions to our health care crisis," said RoseAnn DeMoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association. "Single payer health care reform is the most cost effective, comprehensive approach, as other industrialized countries have learned. It has the unified support of nurses and the public."

SB 810 is co-authored by 43 legislators in both houses, including Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, Assembly Speaker Karen Bass, Senator Elaine Alquist, chair of the Senate Committee on Health, and Assemblymember Dave Jones, chair of the Assembly Committee on Health. The bill is also supported by a broad coalition of patients, nurses, doctors, teachers and school employees, retired workers, local governments and school districts. The Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest public school system in the U.S., supports the legislation because it would save the school district millions of dollars each year.

"SB810 creates a health care system that allows us to provide our patients with the health care they deserve and that we desire; it lets us spend less time with billing paperwork and more time with our patients," said Jonah Muniz, a medical student at the University of California-Davis Medical School. "Most importantly, it guarantees everyone access to the health care services they need. We'll finally be able to treat our patients based on our clinical judgment, not the patient's health care coverage."

The California Universal Health Care Act is nearly identical to legislation (SB 840) that was introduced in 2007 by former Senator Sheila Kuehl. The California Legislature passed SB 840 in 2008, but it was vetoed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

For more information, contact Ali Bay at 916-651-4550.