



How Will You Look At Yourself In The Mirror In Two Weeks?

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Today, the United States Census Bureau reports the growing numbers of uninsured – both adults and children. This increase is particularly troubling in that it occurs during a period of sustained economic growth. The cause is clear: fewer Americans covered by private employment based insurance due to the rising costs of coverage and its impacts on affordability for employers and for employees.

This year we have a Governor, Assembly Speaker and Senate President who are all in agreement that far-reaching health reforms are necessary. Their proposed reforms are not identical but at least roughly compatible. Their proposed solutions combine a mix of public and private financing to cover the uninsured and reforms to make markets work much better in controlling the rise in health spending and to improve overall health and quality of care. This is neither socialized medicine (British style) nor single payor (Canadian style) nor individual catastrophic coverage with tax deductibility (President Bush's proposal); it does propose to build on California's existing structures of mixed public and private coverage,

In California and the nation, we came close to passing coverage for all in the early 90s; it has been nearly 15 years since and we are now again very close to reforming health care. It has been over 40 years since the federal enactment of Medicare for seniors and the disabled and Medicaid for the poor. How long are you willing to wait?

As I write, many of you are working hard to assure that favorable resolution of your issues is included/maintained in the reform package. Some have given up, concluded they are powerless and are ready to blame others that their advice was not taken or their help not solicited. Still others are working hard to oppose reform as inimical to their own best interests.

The next two weeks in Sacramento will be a crazy pressure cooker as opponents seek to block the reforms and supporters seek to consolidate gains through passage. What are you planning to do?

Reform has very narrow and hard to reach windows of political and policy opportunity but thereafter, broad vistas for adjustments. Are you opening or shutting these windows?

If we succeed in passing a reform, further changes are inevitable. If we fail to pass reform, when do you think the next real opportunity will present itself?

How are you responding to the challenge of change? Political leaders, legislative and administrative staffers are not all-powerful insulated "others". They are an extension and reflection of each of us – our internal ambivalence about change, our important self-interest and our unerring reach for the immediate and tangible reward. They also need to look beyond to the long-term balance of personal and economic health for all the state's citizens; we ought to encourage and endorse this level of statesmanship.

Reforms create building blocks for the future that must by their nature challenge our own familiar present. What building blocks in the reform effort do you support and have you expressed that support?

What ought to be our message? I think it should be multi-layered.

- Cover all Californians: cover all California's children, cover working families, and cover all adults.
- Make coverage more affordable, slow the rise in health spending, improve the quality of health care, cover basic health care services, reduce administrative costs and dismantle health coverage barriers.
- Shared responsibility for financing, we're all in this together, and we are all ready to make some sacrifices to get our state to a better future.