

San Diego Regional Network Meeting

Creating Regional Advocacy Infrastructure

Friday, April 11, 2008 12:00 to 3:30pm

San Ysidro Health Center

1275 30th Street, San Diego, CA

Minutes

12:00pm

Registration and lunch

12:30pm

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Vanessa Cajina, Latino Coalition for a Healthy California

Ana Melgoza, San Ysidro Health Centers

- *SYHC's introductory DVD provides meeting participants with history and background.* Our initial clinic, referred to as *la casita*, was opened in 1969 by volunteer women who wanted to serve their community.
- We have come full circle, in that some of the children who attended the initial clinic in the early 1970s have now returned as college graduates and are employed by the San Ysidro Health Centers.
- SYHC serves some 50,000 members of the community, and has just broke ground on a new development, the Child and Maternal Health Center, carrying on a tradition that began four decades ago.

12:38pm

Member Introductions

Vanessa Cajina, Regional Networks Coordinator, Latino Coalition for a Healthy California

- Today, we have a very diverse room. This is great that all of us are able to come together, in order to work on fixing our state and region's health problems.
- Member Introductions
- Introduction of Senator Denise Moreno Ducheny

12:41pm

Keynote Address: Reaching a Balanced Budget for California

The Honorable Denise Moreno Ducheny, California State Senate

Chair, Senate Budget Committee

- It has been a while since California has seen a budget as bad as the current—the last time we were faced with such a deficit was 1991-1992.
- All policy is interrelated; it is impossible to cut one program without affecting other programs.
- Looking at the general budget process, our fiscal year begins July 1 and ends June 30. We know that if legislators are late in passing a budget, our delays will affect you. The Governor then proposes a Budget in January, but Legislators don't really have a good sense of where the budget stands until Mid-May, when the proposed

budget is revised. May is when the State sees revenue come in: Quarter 1 property taxes and April 15th income taxes. June 15th is the deadline for the Legislature to pass a balanced budget.

- Passing the budget is the hard part; it will require compromise in order to earn a 2/3 vote in each house. The 2/3 voting majority rule inhibits our state from making budget decisions
- California has a larger population than most countries, and a larger economy than France or Italy! There is a lot at stake. Our General Fund this year is around \$100 billion, and this pays for K-12 Education, Higher Education, Health, Social Services, Prisons, Courts, Business, Transportation, Housing, and Constitutional Requirements. States provide these direct services—counties administer them.
- California finances its needs through:
 - Sales Tax (\$29 B), which represents 1/3 of our income. Sales tax is tricky because 20% of it comes from the sale of new cars. When people face an insecure economy, they stop buying cars → California could lose revenue
 - Corporation taxes (\$12 B)
 - Personal Income Taxes (\$56 B): this is where the majority of our dollars come from! Of this \$56 billion, nearly half comes from the top 1% of taxpayers; the top 1% wealthiest residents of California make up the bulk of our budget. This means that when the wealthy Silicon Valley tech entrepreneurs have a good year, California has a good year
 - Special Funds and Fees (i.e. vehicle registration fees, recycling, gas ,etc) pay for Highway Patrol, or help out specific programs
- Where do Property Taxes go? Prop 13 assures that property tax revenue goes directly to counties and schools. The state only steps in to equalize property taxes across counties, so that Beverly Hills schools do not receive more funding than Compton schools, just because property is worth more.
- The decreasing General Fund will result in cuts. A 6.6% reduction in funding to Education will result in a loss of 14,000 teachers statewide!
- How did this current crisis happen?
 - Voter Mandates (Initiatives)- we do this to ourselves by voting for changes
 - Federal Cuts to Programs: for example, the feds cutting **legal** immigrants from Food Stamps result in California having to pay millions in order to keep them covered.
 - Tax credits (are treated as permanent, rather than re-evaluating over periods of time)
 - COLAs
 - Vehicle License Fee Reduction: this is **big** and has cost California close to \$6 billion! Background on the issue: since 1948, Californians have paid a 2% property tax on cars. It became the “evil tax” and was reduced to .65%, and now we’ve lost a ton of revenue! Not only did we lose revenue, but we’ve had to pay to make up for it, since they cut money that didn’t even belong to the state. This tax revenue went directly to counties... so, the state has had to backfill and repay counties using the General Fund. This also means that a guy who buys a \$75,000 Mercedes Benz will only

have to pay .65% property tax, and the rest of us have to pay the 1.35% from our income tax to make up the difference.

- *Senator Ducheny then shows a slide detailing the major milestones in the state/local fiscal relationship.*
- If you travel this roadmap, it will ultimately lead you to believe that we need to engage in a structural discussion. We need to determine on the State/ County level (who does what and where the money comes from.) We need to reevaluate our tax structure (we built on taxes that were created for a different/ past economy structure).
- Sarcastically speaking, one of Senator Ducheny's "favorite" Propositions that affect the State General Fund is Prop 49 (After School Programs).
 - It was written so cleverly that we can't undo its current harm
 - According to the proposition, the State *has* to spend \$550 million on after school programs. Even though schools face laying off 14,000 teachers this year, the money will still go towards after school programs. It is obvious how this proposition affects the general fund
- If we look at spending over the last six years by category, we see that Education is decreasing. Health and Social Services are flat lines- funding for these categories never increase, because people cut them in order to save education. Corrections is the only category where spending is actually increasing; corrections cost more than anything else, because we are housing too many in our jails. We spend enough money on corrections to put the inmates through a Harvard Education.
- In the current year, the Governor and Legislature have had to take action:
 - Governor called a special session
 - Legislature approved \$1 billion in cuts (\$500 million to Education alone, COLA delays, and judgeships delayed)
 - \$3.3 billion Economic Recovery Bonds
- Next year's budget faces major decisions
 - The Governor proposes 10% cuts across the board
 - The good thing is that everyone is at the table. The idea of cuts forces everyone to think of other policy issues than their own; we all bear the burden.
 - The bad thing is that the cuts lack foresight/ priorities. Policies are interrelated, so there are some industries that will face *more* than just a 10% loss.
- Perspectives on the Budget: if we don't **pay now** we will **pay later**
 - If we fail to fund education, our workforce will not be prepared in the future
 - If we fail to fund higher education, we will have a decrease in job creation
 - If we cut funding to foster children, we create future prisoners and homeless adults
 - If we fail to fund parolees, we will see a rise in recidivism
 - If we fail to fund seniors and the disabled, we will see costly care services
 - If we fail to fund freeways, we will pay later in traffic.
- One theme that keeps recurring is the corrections crisis. We need to find something to do with our prison system. Parolees already live in our communities. What are

we going to do if we cut funding to the programs that help parolees and keep them from going back to prison? It will cost us much more to sustain them in jail; these people can recover and exist in our society.

- The Legislative Analysts Office has suggested several enhancements to increase revenue. Overall, the LAO is projecting a larger two-year deficit of around \$16 billion.
- Ultimately we should consider restructuring our tax system. We should ask ourselves “is our tax system out of date?” We need to find ways to maximize our Federal Tax Deductions.
- In closing, it would appear that our largest problem is the Prison System. Studies have shown that 75% of inmates were foster children. It is certain that our prisons represent the state’s largest mental health provider because most inmates suffer from serious mental health issues.
- Questions?
 - Has there been an analysis of the effects of the three strike law on the growing corrections problem?
 - Yes, legislators are aware... it needs to be made into an initiative. Also consider the effect of *Jessica’s Law* → now we have homeless sex offenders
 - Spiraling effects of Mental Health Issues: a majority of mental health providers (doctors and nurses) work in correction facilities, because the salaries are higher. The State has had to offer higher salaries in other facilities in order to attract doctors and nurses. This has left some hospitals and many veteran facilities vulnerable (since they cannot offer the higher pay).

1:33pm

Local Impacts and Perspectives on the Budget Crisis

Dr. Greg Talavera, San Ysidro Health Center

- We need to begin a dialogue with Legislators about how to make this budget work for everyone. We can not just say, “please don’t cut my program... cut *that* program instead.”
- On the topic of medically indigent adults (MIAs), health clinics have the training to deal with their special needs, beyond their chronic diseases (i.e. diabetes and hypertension). If they have an illness or need treatment, our clinics will be the ones looking for programs/ funding on their behalf. Community clinics are definitely examples of *what work*.
- Senator Ducheny: We need to talk about *structural* changes. If you know of a model in the community that is duplicative or expendable, tell your Legislator.

The Budget in Overview, Programs Under Fire, and Our Responsibility

Vanessa Cajina, Latino Coalition for a Healthy California

- Our Budget is in trouble. In looking at some of the line items that are being cut, Latinos make up a large percentage of the people affected by Health and Human Services cuts. Some of the cuts to next year’s proposed budget include:
 - Cutting optional benefits for adult Medi-Cal beneficiaries

- 5% rate reductions to Healthy Families plan
- Increasing Healthy Families share of cost
- \$28.3 million decrease to Dept. of Public Health
- Millions of dollars in decreases to CalWORKS through a variety of cuts and sanctions
- We reach a point where we have to realize *this is the world we live in*. Cuts to Healthy Families mean that poor children will lose their coverage. This is the kid whose parents can no longer afford to buy glasses. These children will suffer in school and in life.
- Cutting “optional” benefits from Medi-Cal will have a huge effect. Adults with Medi-Cal are twice as likely to have diabetes as those who are insured through work or privately. These patients will suffer from a loss in vision, chiropractic, and dental coverage if we lose the optional benefits.
- LCHC and its partners have prioritized fighting the reinstatement of Quarterly Status Reports (QSRs) for Medi-Cal. The state projects it will “save” \$184.4 million by doing so, but this is not necessarily the case.
 - QSRs would require beneficiaries to re-determine their assets *every three months*. This is a long and complex form that forces Medi-Cal recipients to determine their income, and asks things like how much they own in jewelry, and whether or not they own funerary plots in foreign countries.
 - We don’t ask individuals to file their income taxes to the IRS every three months
 - Limited English Proficient people will pose a serious health literacy issue, in that increasing the amount of complicate paperwork they are expected to fill out is a major indicator of being dropped from Medi-Cal
 - The main intent of the QSR is to get people to fall off the program. People will fall behind on paperwork and will lose their Medi-Cal coverage – this is where the state’s projected savings come from.
 - Senator Ducheny mentions that QSRs will be a struggle in the Legislature. Republicans don’t think the forms are hard to fill out. It is our job to help them understand that this may not be the best action to serve our children/ counties
- Senator Ducheny also brings up that May 15th through May 30th will be “hell week” for the Legislature. After the May Revise (May 15th), we will know exactly how much our state has in revenue, and this is when you will see the real discussion of each line item.
- So what can we do?
 - Power of the Pen: sign on to a letter to tell legislators how you feel about this budget!
 - Raise your voice: call your Senator or Assemblymember
 - Share your stories with other advocates—let us know how this budget hurts your community.
 - Sen. Ducheny adds: *what counts is when constituents write their representatives and say exactly how these cuts will affect them.*
- One participant asks the Senator about the “No Tax Pledge.” Exactly how many Republicans have pledged not to raise any taxes?

- *Every single* Republican Assemblymember has signed the pledge, with the exception of Roger Niello (vice chair, Assembly Budget Committee). This is a serious problem and represents a lack of understanding on their parts, regarding programs and how people will be affected.
- Republicans are happy to throw Medi-Cal and Latinos under the bus in order to prevent tax increases. The sad thing is that Latinos represent the highest workforce participation rates in California (Latinos should be the last worry on their minds, not the first ones they're willing to cut.)
- We need to think of *who* we know in *what* areas. There are districts out there that are currently “not safe,” because the senate and assembly representative are approaching their term limit. We need to get them with *facts*. Get creative on how we can reach these legislators and how we will be able to get key Republicans to vote against their Caucus. This is the only way we can fight the *no tax pledge*: facts and your stories.

Descansito

2:27pm

Healthcare in el estado dorado: 2007 in review, 2008 in focus

Vanessa Cajina, Latino Coalition for a Healthy California

- Although 2007 was dubbed as “the year of healthcare reform,” it proved to be a difficult issue to navigate. Healthcare is inherently *personal and political*.
- 2008 Priority Legislation: Health Disparities
 - AB 2735 (Hernandez), LCHC is sponsoring this bill—it creates a task force to develop a master plan for increasing and diversifying California’s healthcare workforce; strengthens data collection and reporting
 - Status: will be heard on April 17 in Labor and Employment committee- send a letter of support!
 - AB 3027 (de León), LCHC supports—would help inform Limited English Proficient patients of where they could find interpretive services across California’s health care system
 - Status: will be heard on April 15 in Assembly Health—Send a letter of support!
- 2008 Priority Legislation: Access to Healthcare
 - SB 564 (Ridley-Thomas), LCHC co-sponsors—would provide the infrastructure needed to expand the number of school health centers and increase access to healthcare services
 - Status: 2 year bill; awaiting next placement
 - SB 32 (Steinberg), LCHC supports—creates health coverage program for ALL California children under 300%fpl and ease enrollment process for Healthy Families/ Medi-Cal
 - Status: 2 year bill, held in Legislature, and waiting next placement
 - It is important to note that only three groups registered in opposition to this bill, including the San Diego County Board of Supervisors
- 2008 Priority Legislation: Community Health

- SB 1420 (Padilla), LCHC supports—would require specified food facilities (chain restaurants) to provide nutrition information on their menus. This bill is supported by the Cancer Society. The main opposition is the California Restaurants Association.
 - Status: passed through Senate health, now on to Senate Floor
- AB 2572 (Parra), LCHC opposes—would offer restaurants the option of disseminating nutritional information through a number of different venues. This bill is supported by the California Restaurants Association
 - Status: passed in Assembly Health, now to Appropriations- send a letter of opposition!
- AB 2474 (Galgiani) LCHC supports—would require DPH to establish a program that implements recommendations for improvement, including obesity prevention programs/ tracking.
 - Status: passed Assembly Health, now to Appropriations—send a letter of support!
- AB 48 (Alquist) LCHC supports—expands and supports healthy retail foods in underserved communities, as well as technical support to existing food retailers to improve food choices
 - Status: 2 year bill; held in Assembly Appropriations Committee
- AB 1472 (Leno), LCHC supports—establishes the California Healthy Places Act, which would work together to improve environmental health and provide assistance and funding to local governments.
 - Status: 2 year bill; held in Senate Appropriations Committee

2:43pm

Covering California's Kids: What are the next steps post- healthcare reform?

Lindsey Wade, Senior Policy Associate, Children's Defense Fund

- The Children's Defense Fund has discovered many staggering statistics in following Children's health coverage. With thousands of children across California uninsured, there is still work to do.
- To reiterate on some of the cuts mentioned before, there are many proposed budget cuts that will hurt children and low income adults:
 - QSRs—a child should not be punished for their parent's inability to file paperwork
 - Eliminating "optional" Medi-Cal benefits and services for adults, such as: dental, orthopedic, chiropractic, incontinence creams and washes, acupuncture, audiology, optometry, optical, podiatry, psychology, and speech therapy
 - A 10% cut in current year (2007-08) Medi-Cal reimbursement rates (when California already has one of the worst reimbursement rates in the country)
 - A 5% rate cut to Healthy Families Plans
- By Fiscal Year 2009-2010, the cumulative number of children expected to lose Medi-Cal coverage will be 286,600

- On top of this drop-off, counties will lose money from the cuts as well, and there will be an added administrative fee for Medi-Cal applicants' redetermination
- The Governor has also proposed an increase in the monthly premium that families will pay out of pocket per child.
 - The administration's own estimates indicate that implementing this policy would result in 60,000 to 70,000 children losing their health insurance
 - *Do not repeat history*: In 2002, Florida increased monthly premiums by \$5 per child per month. This resulted in a 55% disenrollment rate. Florida still has not gotten these kids covered again!
- Healthy Families Dental Benefit Cap: If this proposal is implemented, it is estimated that 45,000 children would be affected. Poor oral health leads to missed school days and systemic health problems.
- The California Budget Project has calculated the number of children in San Diego expected to feel the impact of budget cut. Using data from the Department of Finance and the Department of Health Care Services, it is projected that 13,870 kids in San Diego County will lose Medi-Cal and 5,752 kids will lose Healthy Families.
- Even worse is the impact on Federal Funds: By cutting \$430 million from children's health, the state will relinquish over \$800 million in federal funding (the less our state spends on federal programs, the more we forfeit in federal funds).
- Our options for expanding children's health coverage in California:
 - Ballot Initiative
 - Time ran out for getting funds to put an initiative on the November 2008 ballot. Our next best bet is the following ballot in 2010
 - Legislation
 - AB1 & SB 32 would finish the job of covering kids in California. It would also ease the enrollment process and help keep the kids covered.

3:06pm

Food Security for Latinos in LA: Special update from the USDA Food Stamp Outreach Program

Dennis Stewart, Regional Director of the Food Stamp Program, USDA

Joe Torres, Director of Civil Rights, USDA

- The USDA wants your help in enrolling individuals in federal *entitlement* programs. Everyone who is eligible for these programs is entitled, since the federal government does not limit the amount they will fund.
- In a recent UCLA study, it was discovered that a high percentage of Latinos suffer from some level of hunger.
- There is a monetary impact associated with hunger:
 - Counties and States spend \$75 billion a year on the results of poor nutrition
 - As Senator Ducheny was saying, if you don't do something about hunger *now*, you will pay for it later. Prevention is much less expensive than waiting for catastrophic results and paying emergency care fees for poor nutrition.

- San Diego alone loses millions of dollars *every month* in potential Food Stamp funding. This money is lost because individuals who are eligible for the program do not enroll (especially within the Latino community).
- We need community organizations to help the federal government enroll eligible individuals. The USDA cannot reach these individuals without your active involvement. Community based organizations have the invested trust of the public, and have the power to educate them on how to enroll in the Food Stamp Program and in the School Lunch programs.
- Undocumented individuals are not eligible for the Food Stamp Program, though many immigrants are eligible.
- California only has a participation rate of 49% among eligible households; whereas other states have much higher rates. Why does it work in other states, but not in California? Community based organizations are the key! Oregon is a special case, because the Governor pledged that no one in his state would suffer from hunger; food security was his priority.
- Joe Torres steps in to explain that the difference between food security and food insecurity is *hunger*. Food Stamps are the Federal Government's response to poverty and hunger.
- The hunger crisis taking place in the Latino Community is not something that has been widely studied. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) published a study in 2006, estimating 4 million Latinos going hungry—this number has likely risen over the past few years.
- The USDA needs your help to develop strategies that will work for your community. We want to make today the beginning of a long-term relationship addressing this issue. How can you get involved?
 - Look to the San Diego Hunger Coalition for support/advice
 - Participate! Engage the community like the Hunger Coalition is currently doing
- San Diego County has a 27% participation rate.
- Today, we need your help with Food Stamps. Not having Food Stamps when you need them leads to staggering economic effects and staggering nutrition consumption
- *The best way to for the public to understand what is going on, is to hear it from community based organizations.* The public needs to hear about Food Stamps from people they *trust*.
- Elena Quintero, an employee of County of San Diego, is able to offer us an administrative perspective. She works with the Hunger Coalition, and sees all of their hard efforts.
 - One major barrier to getting individuals enrolled in programs is the stigma of being an immigrant
 - Even though the County provides materials to enroll, individuals still have to present the materials to the State—this is not a friendly process
 - Elena is involved in the Food Stamp Coalition as well, and conducts educational outreach meetings in Spanish.
 - Much of the best outreach for the community are people like us, from community based organizations

- We must get involved for the good of the community, and to improve Latino nutrition as well.

3:35pm
Adjourn