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# Pushing the Single Payer Plan

## A local group forms to oppose Clinton's health proposal

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**BETWEEN NOW AND MAY 1, DON'T BE SURPRIS**ed if you are hailed outside a theater, on the street or in a mall and asked to sign a petition favoring a "single payer" national health care plan.

"We need to gather 15,000 signatures locally, so we'll need to be out there about a hundred hours a week," single payer advocate Judy Leslie told her troops at a recent kick-off rally in Santa Cruz.

In her audience were more than a hundred canvassers who have now fanned out across the county to enlist grassroots support for a Canadian-style, tax-supported health care system that is slowly gaining adherents in Congress. Statewide, petition drive organizers hope to garner 1.1 million signatures by the end of April.

Their goal is to put single payer onto the state ballot this November as an initiative, which would give California voters the chance to adopt such a system even if Congress heads in another direction. Once an effective single-payer operation is up and running here, supporters say, other states will follow suit.

While opponents dismiss the single payer system as "socialized medicine," Leslie and colleague Annette Dow are convinced it is the only fair, economical and workable alternative to a far more costly "managed competition" model favored by the Clinton Administration and the nation's "Big Six" insurance companies.

Leslie and Dow are not alone. Backing them at the kick-off rally were U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, County Supervisors Fred Keeley and Gary Patton, Santa Cruz City Councilman

Mike Rotkin, Dr. Helen Lewis of the Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, Emily Nuber of the County Health Department, and Salinas attorney Bill Monning, a rising star in the local progressive Democratic firmament.

Monning, the surprise runner-up to Farr in last year's 17th District Congressional race, went so far as to predict that health care will be one of the two core issues driving this year's state elections, the other being immigration.

"Our system is in desperate disrepair," said Monning, whose wife, Dr. Dana Kent, is on staff at Natividad Hospital in Salinas. Monning told of a Natividad Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurse so ill with diabetes complications that she could hardly work. When asked why she didn't report to the hospital's emergency room, Monning said, the nurse replied that she cannot afford medical insurance and is in debt from her last emergency room visit. "People who are caring for patients don't themselves have health care," Monning said. A single payer system, Monning feels, could cut California's health bills in half — to \$40 billion a year — by making government the health care administrator and making the consumer "the person who should control and dictate how health care is provided."

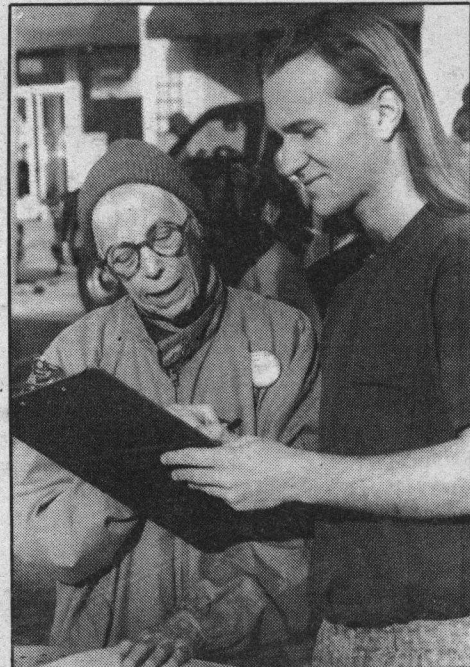
If a single-payer system is not enacted, warned physician Nunberg, the nation might end up with the Clinton "managed competition" model, which she termed "a disaster" that would enrich a few huge health insurance carriers and drastically diminish care choices.

"The Clinton plan would complete the corporatization of medicine," Nunberg said. "A few giant insurance companies would control virtually all of our health care resources, including hospitals, HMOs and doctors. Small insurers would not be able to compete."

She added that the top corporate health providers are so profitable that Hospital Corporation of America CEO Thomas Frist makes \$100 million a year, yet pays the same health insurance premiums as his aver-

*'The Clinton health care reform proposal is a disaster.'*

— Dr. Helen Nunberg



**Volunteer Sally Ross talks to Christo Purdin about the California Health Security Act**

age employee, who makes \$23,000 a year. "An income tax would be a fairer funding mechanism" than the present system of insurance premiums, she said.

Monning added that more than a fourth of the nation's health care dollars are swallowed up by "administration expenses" like eight-figure CEO salaries and battalions of hospital "paper pushers" who do nothing but bill insurance companies. If single payer is adopted, Monning predicted, "the money saved in reduced costs is going to be more than enough to cover all uninsured people in the United States."

— Tom Stevens