

Press Democrat - Editorial - Crisis Ignored

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## **CRISIS IGNORED**

### **HOW MANY OFFICIALS DOES IT TAKE TO RECOGNIZE HEALTH CARE NEEDS?**

This was going to be the year that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the state Legislature agreed on health care reforms. Remember?

Here in Sonoma County, people understand the acute need for a coherent response from the state -- and from the federal government, too. One major hospital is making plans to close. Others are struggling to survive. Community groups are working hard at creating programs that make sure children get the medical care they need.

Yet, the Legislature is poised to adjourn its 2007 session without agreeing with the governor on a health-care package. Hoping for an 11th-hour miracle, Schwarzenegger on Tuesday called for a special session to keep the conversation alive. Unfortunately, it's difficult to be optimistic about the prospects.

An agreement contrived at the 11th hour might be worse than no agreement. And the political dynamics haven't changed. There can be no legislation unless the Republican governor and the Democratic majorities in both houses agree, and eight months of talking hasn't brought them closer together.

With a presidential election year now on the horizon, it might be 2009 before Republicans and Democrats will look past partisan considerations to make sure a few million kids get the health care they need.

State government continues to be defined by its inability to respond to issues that matter to people. Everyone in Sacramento knew the public's frustrations with health care systems as they now exist. Insurance costs are going up, and services are going down. Hospitals are in financial trouble. Millions are left uninsured.

No one expected the governor and the Legislature to transform health care. But the public hoped state government could begin the job. Other states have passed health care reforms.

But the governor and Legislature seemed incapable of negotiating a health care deal without agreement on a state budget, which wasn't resolved until Aug. 24, 54 days late.

So here we are. There is a variety of opinions about what's wrong with state government -- excess partisanship, unfair reapportionments, special interest politics. What's not in doubt is that state government doesn't work very well, and sometimes it doesn't work at all.