

# Schwarzenegger Pushes For Universal Care

Governor seeks bipartisan unity in creating health coverage for all Californians

**Daniel Zarchy**  
National News Reporter

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has turned over much more than a new leaf these days, as he is pushing forward his proposal to provide universal health care to all residents of California, documented and otherwise.

This proposed legislation, which the governor

introduced in his State of the State Address on Jan. 9, would provide every Californian with medical insurance through either their employer or the government. Employers of 10 or more workers not offering their employees insurance would have to deposit four

the plan is adopted.

California, the fourth state in the nation to propose this type of socialized health insurance system, has nearly 6.5 million uninsured residents.

Sabrina Lockhart, deputy press secretary for Gov. Schwarzenegger, explained that emergency rooms are legally required to provide emergency services to anyone, whether they have insurance or not, and that these costs came out of taxpayers' pockets anyway. By providing cheap health care, it could reduce costs for all Californians.

"With everyone having health care coverage, they won't have to go to the emergency room for non-emergency care," Lockhart said in an interview with *City on a Hill Press*. "We're seeing a problem where hospitals with emergency rooms are closing all over the state; more than 60 ERs in California have closed in the last decade because they can't afford to treat people without insurance."

She went on to explain

that employers who offer their employees insurance would receive large tax incentives, as they could pay for the insurance with pre-tax dollars.

However, when asked to comment on the potential political fallout from Republican leadership as a result of this move, Lockhart refused to answer the question directly, simply reiterating that "Governor Schwarzenegger is committed to providing quality health care to all Californians."

A spokesperson from Kaiser Permanente, a major insurance provider for the state of California, felt that the governor shared Kaiser's views.

"We share his goal of providing access to high-quality health care for all Californians," he said. "Any universal health care proposal should strengthen and sustain the safety net by providing more reliable funds." Ryan Oprea, assistant professor of economics at UC Santa Cruz, had mixed feelings on the issue.

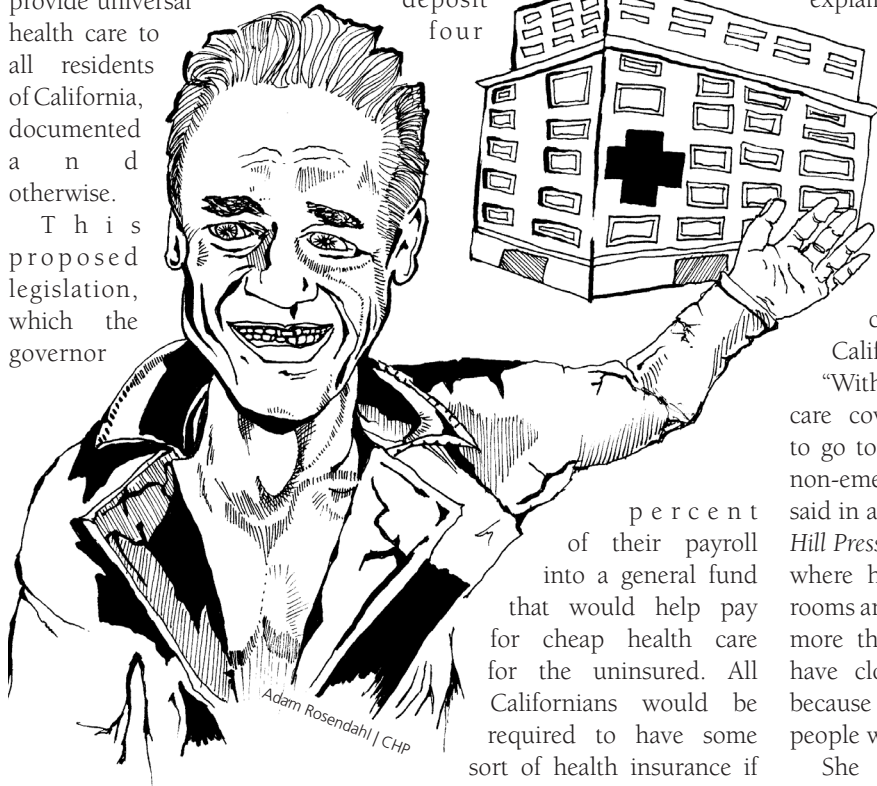
"I think it has some good things about it and some bad things about it," Oprea said. "One good thing is that it has most people shopping

on their own for private insurance. If you are going to force people to have health insurance, the best way is to require people—the ones who can afford it—to buy their own."

"Because federal laws allow employers (and only employers) to use pre-tax dollars," Oprea continued, "employers end up paying a lot less than other consumers."

With Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposed plan, even if employers do not offer health care, the four percent they will pay to help subsidize it for others will also come from pre-tax dollars, lowering the cost for consumers seeking health care outside of their employers.

"I think there are a number of problems with the plan, specifically those dealing with how to extend insurance to the uninsured," Oprea said. "As it is, the plan will massively expand a likely inefficient and already unwieldy bureaucracy... It would make a lot more sense to give vouchers to the uninsured to buy their own insurance in a competitive market."



percent of their payroll into a general fund that would help pay for cheap health care for the uninsured. All Californians would be required to have some sort of health insurance if

## Report Reveals Educational Shortcomings

California public school children failing to reach proficiency levels in English, math

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California children may be better off growing up elsewhere, and the culprit looks like the state's K-12 education system.

In a national survey that measures a child's chance of success throughout life, California ranks 34th among all states. The researchers at the nonprofit Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (EPERC) in Washington D.C. compiled statistics from 13 different categories ranging from parents' employment and English language fluency to children's test scores and graduation rates. The statistics for each state were then stacked up against the national average in order to determine the ranking.

California lags behind the national average in areas of English and math proficiency among elementary school and middle school students. According to the report, 21 percent of fourth graders are proficient in reading, seven points below the national average. The results are almost identical in math proficiency among eighth graders.

Pablo Reguerin, deputy director of the Educational Partnership Center (EPC),

which is the outreach arm of UC Santa Cruz, emphasized the importance of reading and math skills in early education.

"There are certain areas in the pipeline where students face problems," Reguerin said in an interview with *City on a Hill Press* (CHP). "When students are not reading by the third grade and up, it becomes a major problem."

This setback in early education is one of the primary reasons California ranks so low in the national ranking, according to Patrick Miller, a researcher with the EPERC.

"Linguistic integration is one of the main areas [in which] California loses ground," Miller said.

Linguistic integration refers to the number of student's parents that are fluent in English. California has the lowest percentage among all 50 states in linguistic integration, at only 62 percent—over 22 percent below the national average.

Larry Trujillo, the executive director of Student Academic Support Services at UCSC, which provides academic help to many second language students, believes that students who speak English as a second language are put at a particular disadvantage because they have not

mastered enough of the language to do well on standardized tests. Part of the blame for this may fall on a child's parents.

"Parents come to the United States for a better education for [their] children," Trujillo said. "But some don't have the language or education to help these children."

Critics of the state's education system blame California's schools for not adequately preparing ESL students to succeed. Miller said that California is "weakest in education" and Trujillo called the K-12 system in California an "absolute crisis."

California's educational woes may have their root in national education policy. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), implemented in 2001, aims to improve the performance of schools by raising accountability standards for each state, but it has caused significant problems in California.

"The No Child Left Behind policy is a much bigger crisis," Trujillo said. "It's difficult to get students proficient in [math and English], but the standards have doubled and it's getting to the point where nobody is passing."

The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

provision of NCLB, which monitors achievement levels among second language and low-income students, requires schools to offer parents the option of moving their children to another school if theirs do not reach adequate AYP levels within two years. According to the California Department of Education website, four out of the nine schools in Santa Cruz have not reached their AYP within the two-year time frame.

Assemblyman John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) explained some of the logistical problems with NCLB in a recent phone interview with CHP.

"The problem [with NCLB] is that it is totally inadequately funded and the standards are very different from state standards," he said.

However, the state legislature may have a shot at addressing some of the shortfalls in education in the coming weeks. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger submitted his 2007-2008 budget proposal to the legislature last week to review and propose any changes in the budget.

"We [now] have the power of the budget to try and address problems in education," Laird said.