

District 13 Report/ July 16, 2008

From the Desk of Senator Dede Feldman

Dear Friends, Neighbors and Constituents,

Bonjour! They stormed the French prison, the Bastille, during this week (July 14) in 1789, which is marked in France as the first day of the French Revolution to overthrow the monarchy and the start that country's long march toward democracy.

Well, far from those barricades, I'm just trying to march through the summer here, clean up after the successful primary campaign and keep up with recent developments in health care and the economy. No small task. A few weeks ago I went to a great conference in D.C. with other chairmen of Legislative Health Committees from around the country. We got to hear about what was really happening with the Massachusetts Health Care Reform - two years out - directly from the people who created the bill and shepherded it through the legislature. We shared ideas for health care reform and its various aspects - i.e. cost containment, insurance reform, electronic medical records, etc. and found out what worked and what didn't. I've invited a few of these speakers to appear before the Health and Human Services Committee during the interim, and the information was useful as we seem to be headed to a Special Session on Health Care and other matters in early September.

Meanwhile, two local projects that have been in the works for some time now have just come to fruition. One is a bridge over the Griegos lateral, which makes walking the north-south ditch called the Griegos Drain (runs from Matthew to Montano, and further north) much easier. Now all of us that walk the ditches can get from the South to the Los Poblanos Open Space (formerly Anderson Field) where you can now see corn growing (the Maize Maze is just around the corner), coyotes, Sandhill cranes (in season), and enjoy a great view of the Sandias.

The other is a mural on the outside of the North Fourth Art Center, which inhabits what was formerly a non-descript strip shopping center on 4th Street just north of Griegos. The mural was painted by students from the Working Classroom, under the leadership of international muralist Reymundo Sesma. Occupants of the building, people with disabilities who participate in the Very Special Arts daytime program, have been delighted by the process - and the result. Special thanks to two women who made it possible - Marg Nessel, director of Very Special Arts, and Nan Elsaser, director of the Working Classroom. For a photo of the colorful mural go to my blog at <http://senatorfeldman.typepad.com>. I'm delighted to have sponsored state capitol outlay funds for both of the projects.

This week, I'll be in Las Cruces where the Health and Human Services Committee is meeting Wednesday and Thursday and in Deming, where it reconvenes on Friday.

Here's an article about the topics we'll be dealing with in Las Cruces. I posted it on Health Haussaman's blog (<http://haussamen.blogspot.com>), a great on-line newspaper of sorts which focuses on Southern New Mexico.

Mental Health, Drug Addiction Problems A Focus of Las Cruces Hearing

Ask any office holder or candidate about some of the most heartbreaking concerns he or she hears about from voters, relatives and constituents and one topic will rise to the top: New Mexico's alarming rate of mental illness and drug abuse. It seems like almost every family is affected. According to a Gap Analysis that detailed the lack of services for people with mental and substance abuse problems six years ago, one in five New Mexicans has a diagnosable mental illness or substance abuse disorder. The National Association on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports that the national rate is one in four. According to military data, the number of post-traumatic stress disorder cases diagnosed increased 46% over the previous year. The Veterans Services Department estimates that, by the end of the year, New Mexico will be home to 175,000 recent veterans. In Doña Ana County, a group of mental health advocates has been urging the state for years to put more funding into crisis services. Some of Doña Ana's vision on this issue is needed statewide.

In spite of the need, New Mexico is 51st in the nation (not possible, just include the District of Columbia) in spending for behavioral health services, and, until a few years ago, services and funding for this population was a jumble of public private programs with overlapping missions and sources of revenue.

In response to the 2002 Gap Analysis, and at the urging of the Richardson administration, the legislature authorized the reorganization of these services into a Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative. A few years ago, these services were put into a managed care system. That service contract is currently held by Value Options but is now out to bid.

The past several years have brought dramatic change to the system for patients, providers and family members. These changes - and the status of behavioral health services statewide - will be subject of hearings before the legislature's interim Legislative Health and Human Services Committee, which will be meeting at the Memorial Medical Center at 2450 So. Telshor Blvd., Wednesday July 16th and Thursday July 17th in Rooms A & B.

Becky Beckett, president of NAMI New Mexico, Silvia Sierra, Director of the Doña Ana County Health and Human Services Department, and two of the chief executives of behavioral health hospitals - Margaret McCowan, of the Mesilla Valley Hospital, and Joe Rodriguez, of Peak Behavioral Health Services, will kick off a panel at 10:30am, Wednesday, July 16th. Sue Campbell, Co-chair, 3rd Judicial District Behavioral Health Collaborative, will also participate in the BH panel on Wednesday.

The committee will also hear a report on the status of health care reform efforts, which may play into a special legislative session, which the Governor has said he will call in early September. The committee is soliciting public comment on these and other topics at 4:00pm, Wednesday, July 16th and 3:30pm, Thursday, July 17th.

Local Initiatives Highlighted

In spite of inadequate funding for behavioral health services and the legislature's reluctance to address overall health care reform, Doña Ana always comes up with great models to address the health care needs of its unique population here at the border. One of them, which the committee will hear about on Thursday, July 17th, is the use of promotoras, or community health workers, to give families advice and support, reduce use of emergency rooms, and promote lifestyle modifications needed to manage chronic diseases.

Medicaid Issues Persist

According to the most recent available statistics, there were 39,904 children enrolled in Medicaid in Doña Ana County - with potentially many more eligible for services. Due to funding issues, however, the Human Services Department (HSD) is cutting back on outreach. At the recent Legislative Finance Committee hearings in Chama, acting-Governor Diane Denish stressed that setting children between birth and five years old on a healthy path is essential for a healthy society. I agree. Our goal needs to be - at the very least – ensuring that every child eligible for Medicaid is signed up and accessing the services he or she needs. For more information on the agenda go to the legislative website at <http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs/> .

Respectfully,

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