

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Lawmakers have a challenge. That was reinforced when I attended the legislative town hall meeting on the Governor's proposed budget cuts last Friday at Southwest Minnesota State University. There was a huge attendance and everyone who spoke had 2 1/2 minutes. I spoke not on my own behalf, but on behalf of some of the most vulnerable in our society, some of who are my dental patients.

As a practicing dentist in our area, I know that the proposed budget cuts in dental services will have a devastating impact on those whose oral health is most fragile. If dental care for needy adults is eliminated, as proposed, many people in our community will be forced into emergency rooms. This is an expensive and inefficient use of hospital ERs.

The Governor has also mistakenly suggested eliminating a highly successful critical access dental program that currently treats 225,000 public program patients annually. Ironically, the funds to provide this care exist, even in this tight economy. Dentists pay approximately \$35 million each year in healthcare taxes to provide dental services to needy individuals. However, the Governor wants to shift the tax dollars collected for health care to the general fund.

I hope our lawmakers will wisely retain funding for these dental programs. It only makes sense to help those who need care most. And to act before it becomes more painful and more expensive for all of us to repair.

Sincerely,
Michael R. Thomas, DDS
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