

## Dentists fear cuts in coverage will leave gaps

By Heather J. Carlson

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**BLOOMING PRAIRIE** — Unable to work after suffering serious head trauma while on the job, Susette Garcia can not afford dental insurance.

The 36-year-old relies on disability payments to help care for herself and her 3-year-old son. But a proposal in Gov. Tim Pawlenty's budget means adults like Garcia would no longer receive state-funded dental care — except for emergencies.

"I'd lose my teeth if they wouldn't let me come," she said.

Pawlenty's budget proposal would eliminate dental care from more than 390,000 adults, saving the state about \$51 million through mid-2011. The governor has said these cuts are necessary to slow the rising growth in the state's health care programs. In the next budget cycle, the cost of state health care programs was expected to climb more than 26 percent. Under Pawlenty's proposal, spending would increase by more than 10 percent.

But getting rid of state funded dental care will end up costing taxpayers more in the long run, according to dentist Dr. John Flor. He practices at Main Street Dental in Blooming Prairie, which has a special clinic dedicated to serving patients on state assistance. Last year, nearly 8,000 patients from across Minnesota traveled to the clinic for treatment. Up to 40 percent of those patients come from Olmsted County.

If the state eliminates adult dental care coverage, the clinic that serves low-income patients will be forced to close, he said.

"The savings to the state by eliminating adult dental care will be temporary at best because when these fillings aren't filled, the teeth abscess and they have to go to the emergency rooms to get care," Flor said.

The governor has said that some of his proposed cuts to health care may need to be restored based on requirements for getting money from the \$787 billion federal stimulus package.

Area dental professionals will voice their opinions at a listening session in Rochester hosted by the DFL-controlled House and Senate.

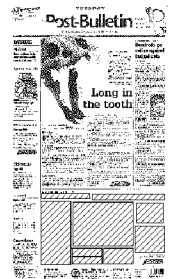
Flor said he has contacted area lawmakers to voice his concerns.

"This population is probably not very well represented by lobbyists and it's easy to take from the poor. But in our world, poor people still need help."

*The Associated Press contributed to this article.*

### LISTENING SESSION

Lawmakers are hosting a budget listening session at 6 p.m. Thursday in the Heintz Center Commons Area at Rochester Community and Technical College, 1926 Collegeview Road S.E. Those wishing to speak can sign up at the Minnesota House or Senate Web site.





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**Dr. John Flor cares for a patient with help from dental assistant Tami Brooks at the Main Street Dental Clinic in Blooming Prairie.**