

LETTERS

Retain funding for dental programs

To the editor:

Lawmakers have a challenge. That was reinforced when several of us dentists who provide oral health care to the more vulnerable citizens in Todd and Douglas counties attended the legislative town hall meeting on the governor's proposed budget cuts Friday afternoon in Alexandria.

As a practicing dentist in Long Prairie, 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 in Minnesota pay about \$35 million each year in healthcare taxes to provide dental services to needy populations. But the governor wants to shift the tax dollars collected for healthcare 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 to all of us to repair.

John Nei
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