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November 14, 2017

Chris Niehaus
Chair
Humboldt County Progressive Democrats

I respectfully ask that you read this letter to your club members prior to discussing agenda items related to me.

I became aware of agenda items that call for a discussion on “strategy and tactics” to prevent me from receiving the endorsement of the Democratic Party and a proposal to “admonish” me because of “active opposition to SB562.” I would like to offer my side of the issue for consideration. I am surprised and disappointed that no one has reached out to me on this. As someone who places an extremely high value on honesty and integrity I am offended at the false allegations.

I want to state for the record that I am not in opposition to SB562. I believe that health care is a human right and not a privilege and I am strong believer in the concept of single payer system. The California Democratic Platform states the same but also adds that we must advocate to create “a publicly funded (single-payer), privately delivered, fiscally tractable, affordable, comprehensive, secure, high quality, efficient, and sustainable health care system for all Californians.” This is the exact goal that I am working toward. There are some key words in platform that I have been focusing on – fiscally tractable, affordable, secure, and sustainable.

There is much more to the 2016 Platform for health care that I have been fighting for this past year. I am proud of my work to expand health care by fighting drug companies, expanding healthcare by extending the enrollment period for Covered California, protecting residents in long term care facilities in Eureka and beyond from big companies like Brius, fighting insurance company mergers, expanding mental health services, and protecting air ambulance services.

My work in the Assembly goes well beyond my work as Chair of the Health Committee. I am proud of the work we were able to do on so many other important areas – more money for clean up of destructive rogue cannabis grows, efforts to tackle funding for housing, supporting a new park bond, the Disclose Act, and our historic efforts to combat climate change.

To reiterate, I am not working in opposition to SB562. I applaud the efforts of the authors and sponsors for bringing this bill forward. However, there is considerable work that needs to be done to make the goals of this bill a reality.

Speaker Anthony Rendon made it very clear to the authors of SB562 that there was more work to be done before he would allow it to be heard in the Assembly. Once additional work is done I know he will reconsider moving the bill but to the best of my knowledge that has not been done. Members cannot amend the bill of a colleague in either the Senate or the Assembly. It is the author's duty, privilege, and responsibility to educate a colleague from the other house and leadership on the merits, goals and content of a bill. I look forward to working with the author.

I have spent months reading books, reports, studies and articles. I have spent hours upon hours in meetings looking at the issue of universal care and how to move it forward. My work includes looking at past legislative efforts in California and elsewhere to see and understand what has worked and what has not. Most importantly for our community is to insure that we get our fair share of resources and that we are able to attract and retain health care providers – something we struggle with every day in Humboldt County. So many times our voices are drowned out by the large urban areas and we cannot allow that to continue.

It is my job as Chair of the Assembly Health Committee to ask difficult questions and receive detailed responses on issues before agreeing to support a measure. I never endorse any bills that will come before my committee until after they have been heard. My approach has been interpreted incorrectly as opposition. I would counter that my approach is responsible, thoughtful, realistic and pragmatic.

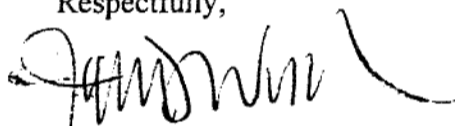
In February 2017, Dr. Jaquin Arambula, Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee on Health and Human Services (and an emergency room physician) and I asked the Speaker to allow us to form the Select Committee on Health Care Delivery System and Universal Coverage and the committee was approved in early March. It was always our intent to hold hearings in the Fall and Winter to research the unique characteristics of health care in California and to work towards fulfilling the charge of our Party platform. As such, we held our first hearing over

two days in October and we have 3 additional hearings planned. This will constitute 30-40 hours of public hearings to discuss and learn from other countries, industry experts, and academic institutions to examine the opportunities and obstacles we have before us as we strive towards universal health care for all Californians, and will constitute the most comprehensive discussion in the legislature on this issue since 2006-07 when Senator Sheila Kuehl's SB840 Single Payer Health bill was passed by the legislature. Our approach is to thoroughly study the issues by bringing all stakeholders to the table and allow what we learn to guide legislation or augment existing legislative proposals. Committees such as this are significant because they allow for extended discussions on complicated issues and provide the groundwork for legislation. The discussions can be more detailed and robust than during the normal legislative hearing process. We are doing the hard work necessary to insure a successful outcome for what we all want – affordable high quality health care for all Californians.

Revamping our entire health care system could be the single most complicated endeavor the state of California has ever undertaken. Accordingly, there is much to learn and consider as we move forward in our goal of health care for all in California. I will continue to do the hard work and endure the criticism that goes along with it until we arrive at a place where we can truly have a financially tractable, sustainable, affordable quality health care system for all in California.

I look forward to working together.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Wood", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Jim Wood

Assemblymember, 2nd District

Cc: Bob Service, Chair, Humboldt County Democratic Central Committee

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