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Local hospitals react to overhaul vote

Medical facilities praise health care measure but express concerns

TREASURE VALLEY — Along with some concerns, local hospitals applauded the health care reform measure approved by the U.S. House of Representatives Sunday — or at least called it a step in the right direction.

In statements issued Monday, Caldwell's West Valley Medical Center and Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center parent company Trinity Health praised the effort to expand health insurance coverage.

Trinity Health is also in the process of acquiring Nampa's Mercy Medical Center.

St. Luke's called the reform measure "a start toward achieving health care coverage for millions of Americans," but said the bill fails to address many of the underlying problems that drive up costs.

In a written statement, the hospital said the legislation doesn't do enough to reduce health care costs. Officials suggested the following changes they said would address problems in the health care delivery system:

-- Align incentives to providers so that they are rewarded for quality, safety and outcomes, rather than for each service provided.

-- Encourage pilot programs that push hospitals and physician networks to work together to provide care in a more efficient manner.

-- Allow for comprehensive tort reform to minimize defensive medicine such as unnecessary tests.

"One of the tenets of medical care is to 'do no harm.' We feel that by adding millions of Americans to the rolls of the insured seeking care in a system not yet prepared to accept them, does a huge disservice to the millions of Americans who have been clamoring for meaningful health care reform," the statement said. "We urge both parties to not give up on health care reform. This is a first step, but much still needs to be done to truly make this historic moment a beneficial one for our nation."

Idaho's entire congressional delegation voted against the bill, saying health care must be addressed but the measure backed by the Democratic majority has too many flaws to be the answer.

Dr. Robert Vestal, co-chairman of the steering committee for Idaho Health Care for All, also called the bill a good first step. Idaho Health Care for All is the Idaho chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program, which advocates for a single-payer system that would eliminate private insurance companies except those that sell optional additional coverage.

"In my opinion, even though I favor single-payer as the solution ... for now this is a major step forward," Vestal said. "I think it remains to be seen how successful the efforts to reduce costs will be. There's no question that the health insurance industry needs to be more tightly regulated."