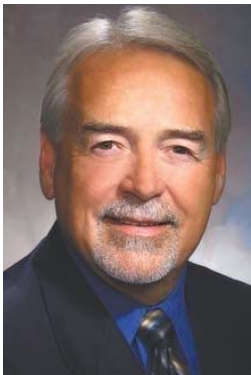


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Playing a vital role

Health care and the economy have dominated the airwaves, Internet and headlines for months. As Congress grapples with "reforming" the health care system, and families and businesses struggle in this difficult economic environment, it seems a logical time to examine how these topics converge.

The Idaho Hospital Association commissioned a University of Idaho economist to study the economic impact community hospitals have across Idaho. Across Idaho, community hospitals provide good-paying jobs to more than 23,000 people. In eastern Idaho, community hospitals from American Falls south to Preston and north to Salmon employ more than 4,500. Collectively, that makes community hospitals one of the largest employers in the area. We're not just talking about doctors, but nurses, technicians, administrators, maintenance staff and the many others who contribute to the high quality medical care at your local community hospital.



The wages paid to those employees -- a total of more than \$1 billion across Idaho -- help purchase all kinds of goods -- groceries, clothing and sports equipment -- and services from lawn and car care to haircuts. These wages also help fund the support of churches, civic groups and philanthropic giving.

Like echoes in a canyon, the dollars directly earned and spent in our community have a repeat effect that further strengthens our economy. Termed a multiplier effect, this residual impact is unique to each industry and within each county.

The economist who performed the study put it this way: "A medical center purchases goods and services in a community, which supports other area businesses. Those businesses in turn purchase even more goods and services as the dollars ripple through the economy."

In eastern Idaho, the multipliers for hospital expenditures and income ranged from 1.31 in the outlying areas to 1.77 in urban areas. When analyzing the jobs created directly and indirectly by those hospitals, the report shows that for every hospital job, another 1.1 jobs are created in our communities.

While these numbers are instructive and demonstrate the importance of community hospitals to our local economies, the most important thing to remember is that it takes dedicated people to meet our medical needs. They work hard to provide the high quality medical care that Idahoans expect and deserve. And, as our nation, state and communities work to recover from the recession, we need to remember that our community hospitals are an extremely important, in fact vital, component of the overall economy. There will undoubtedly be many more weeks, if not months, of health care reform and the economy dominating not just the headlines but discussions at home, work or on ball-field sidelines. Hopefully the information about the economic impact of community hospitals will allow for more informed and constructive dialogue.

Millard is president of the Idaho Hospital Association.