



Maui News Editorial – Nov 23, 2007

Health care study moving

The Maui Health Care Initiative Task Force was created by the 2007 Legislature in lieu of giving the proposed Malulani Health and Wellness Center an exemption from Hawaii's antiquated certificate of need process, or eliminating the process entirely.

Authorizing the task force was, in many ways, a political sop offered by a Legislature dominated by Oahu members afraid to go without the certificate of need process. The reaction in some quarters was to dismiss the task force as just another body creating just another report to just be filed and forgotten. The report, when it is finalized next month, could be the start of a rational development of health care facilities on Maui. Emphasize "could be."

Moving from report to action will take political pressure on Maui's legislative delegation and on the Legislature as a whole. There is little to quibble about in the draft report.

The 15-member task force, including physicians, is leaning on the need for a West Maui facility, specifically the \$70 million West Maui Critical Access Center proposed by the West Maui Improvement Foundation. The report also endorses creating emergency clinics in other underserved areas, especially on Lanai, and an expanded, more efficient emergency helicopter system.

The draft report also notes the obvious – Maui doesn't have enough hospital beds for a tourist-included population of 180,000.

The task force could also consider setting up some sort of process that would allow Maui to raise private funds for hospital improvements and new facilities. On the Mainland, there are many communities of comparable size that fund their own facilities.

More acute and long-term hospital beds? Certainly. A more comprehensive and efficient emergency helicopter system? Most definitely. A west side acute care center? No doubt about it.

In about three months, the Maui Health Care Initiative Task Force has managed to come up with an apparently solid approach to improving medical care on Maui. It will be a long road before anything concrete is done, but the task force report could be a vital first step.