

OPINION

State reforms must ensure health care is accessible

I am delighted to see our state legislators considering approaches to a universal health care system. But beware, for any reforms passed will be meaningless unless they ensure that health care for all our citizens is both affordable and accessible.

One of the most important factors requires budgetary increases for our woefully underfunded Medicaid program. Most doctors cannot even cover their employee salaries and other office expenses with current Medicaid reimbursements. When doctors are able to see Medicaid patients

without losing money, then access will significantly increase.

Ensuring that premiums are truly affordable will require significant regulation of our profit-hungry insurance companies. Yet, with the all-powerful insurance lobby in Hartford, this will prove the greatest obstacle. Gov. M. Jodi Rell's proposal that insurance companies will provide coverage to individuals for premiums of \$250 per month is unrealistic.

The challenges in fixing our dysfunctional health care system are

daunting, but the time is right and way overdue. I urge all citizens of Connecticut to pressure our legislators to avoid micromanagement of specific diseases through more and more mandates and instead to pass meaningful universal health care legislation this session.

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Editor's note: Dr. Robert McLean is chairman of health and public policy for the Connecticut chapter, American College of Physicians.