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IN HONOR OF THE BIG SUR HEALTH CENTER, JULY 9, 2009

House of Representatives

The Honorable Sam Farr

of California

Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the 30th anniversary of the Big Sur Health Center, an independent, state-licensed, not-for-profit, community clinic, nestled in the heart of the beautiful Big Sur Valley. The Center is the only source of out-patient care for the 1,500 residents of the over 100 miles of remote and mountainous Big Sur coast. The Center also serves nearly 3,000,000 tourists who visit the Big Sur coast each year. It is crucial to the welfare of the Big Sur Community. As a Big Sur resident myself, I applaud the work of the health center staff and volunteers who do so much for their neighbors and visitors alike.

The Center grew out of a local, grass-roots effort in the late 1970s, to meet the needs of this rural community with quality comprehensive medical care for all regardless of a patient's ability to pay. At that time, I represented Big Sur as a Monterey County Supervisor. I had the great pleasure of working with Ray Sanborn, Dr. Saul Kunitz and other community leaders.

The Center finally opened its doors in September 1979. By 1985, it had become a 501(c)(3) corporation with a volunteer Board of Directors. That same year BSHC relocated from the Big Sur Grange Hall to its current location on the grounds of the All Saints Episcopal Church. In 2004, following a community-wide fundraising effort, the Center moved out of its old trailers into a new building at that site. Over the years the Center has developed into a busy family practice with over 2,600 patient visits annually. In the last few years the Center has also embarked on several important outreach initiatives. These include an oral health program emphasizing childhood dental care, a program to work with families and school districts to reverse growing rates of childhood obesity, and a multi year effort to reach out to the Big Sur coast's substantial Spanish speaking population.

This spirit of service and professionalism was apparent during the summer and fall of 2008 when the second largest wildfire in California's history besieged the Big Sur community for the better part of two months. The Center staff worked hand in hand with the fire response authorities to help treat injured fire fighters so that they could return to their crews to continue their important work.

Looking to the future, the Center has fully embraced the move to electronic medical records championed by the Congress and President Obama. The Big Sur Health Center has developed and implemented an information technology system that provides practice management, electronic medical records and electronic health information exchange, and assures the protection of critical patient data in the event of a disaster that threatens or destroys the facility. In addition, this system allows for remote access to documents and facilitates patient management in the event of after-hours emergency room visits, or during a community disaster that closes the center. Retrieval of information for disease management in key populations, quality measures reporting, tracking of data and State-mandated annual clinic reporting is no longer the cumbersome and time consuming project of past times. Electronic retrieval and reactivation of patient health records is now done rapidly and accurately. The result is great savings to the Center and faster, better, more attentive care to the patient.

Madam Speaker, the Big Sur Health Center is a national treasure. It exemplifies a kind of dedicated grass-roots based health service that will be a key ingredient in a reformed American healthcare system – first rate medical care, cutting edge technology, in a community based setting. I know I speak for the whole House in extending our congratulations to the Center for a successful thirty years and our wishes for many more to come.