

There are times when life mirrors film, and recently that's come true with health care. Having recently seen the documentary "Sicko," I am troubled by the many difficulties Americans have in accessing affordable health care.

As "Sicko" details, even people with insurance often cannot get medical treatment when they need it. There is something wrong when your health insurance company decides it won't pay. There is also something wrong with a health system that won't pay its doctors when they do treat you. Unfortunately, that's not the insurance industry: that's Medicare.

Here on the Central Coast, the counties of Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito have all been labeled as geographically "rural" in nature. That means Medicare pays doctors in these counties a rural rate, significantly lower than the rates received in high-cost urban areas. The fallacy of this arrangement is that Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito all experience economies similar to their high-cost urban neighbors. That means Medicare is woefully underpaying our doctors in these counties.

Unfortunately, this underpayment has already caused doctors in our area--especially Santa Cruz--to stop seeing new Medicare patients, exacerbating the access problem.

In August, the House of Representatives passed legislation ([H.R. 3162](#)) containing language (Sec. 308) that I authored to fix this problem. However, the Senate has balked at doing the same. Although there are only six more scheduled days remaining in this session of Congress, I am pressing my colleagues in both the House and the Senate to do the right thing and pass this legislation.

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