

Federal Glover: When first signs of swine flu emerged, county officials sprang quickly into action

By Federal Glover
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There is no better argument in favor of the need for public health and safety than what happened with the current bout we are undergoing with swine flu, or the H1N1 virus.

Once informed about the possibility of swine flu cases spreading to the U.S. from Mexico, our County Health Services Department sprang into action. In no time at all, symptoms of the flu were e-mailed and faxed to clinics, schools and the private nonprofit and public agencies.

As soon as an alert principal at Highlands Elementary in Pittsburg noted the ill children at his school, the school district sent word to Health Services. In fewer than two hours, a plan of action was developed and more information about the H1N1 virus was disseminated to the media and to a network of health agencies and hospitals, including the county clinics from West County to East County.

The 13 children with flu-like symptoms were tested and the results sent to the national lab to determine if it was swine flu. Only three were listed as "probable."

Private pharmacies assisted by letting the County

health officials know the availability of the pills needed to treat the virus.

There was no panic, but there was plenty of action. Because of the quick response, the possibility of widespread infection is being prevented.

Unbeknown to the public and media, the mechanism that sprung into high gear could not have occurred if all the various agencies had not undergone months of meetings and drills overseen and coordinated by our County Health Services Department.

Dr. Walker and his staff should be congratulated because they were able to fulfill their duties and perform at a high level of professionalism while undergoing massive cuts in their budget and personnel. Like all county departments, despite the valuable services they provide, HSD has lost a good portion of its budget because of declining revenues and rising health care costs.

Several factors have created or contributed to the conditions now existing:

The state budget, a major source of our funding, is in a shambles and as result, the State has cut what it traditionally has given to us to implement its mandates.

The federal stimulus money expected to fill the gap was not as large as needed, leaving a significant deficit to be dealt with.

Sales and property tax revenues have plunged because of the nationwide mortgage crisis and the curtailed spending as a resultant of the personal financial constraints many families are experiencing.

No department has been spared from these cuts and all departments are sharing the burden of providing

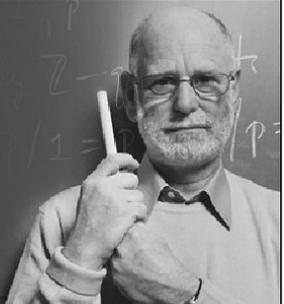
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important services with less resources and staff. Without such cuts, we would be taking an irresponsible step by widening the deficit and ultimately leading to a complete failure of governance.

As the events surrounding the swine flu pandemic have demonstrated — public safety and public health is not an either/or choice. They go hand-in-hand.

The state's overflowing prison system and disastrously poor recidivism rate tells us that suppression by itself is not solving society's problems.

Before the justice system metes out punishment for criminal activity, a long road of anti-social behavior leads up to punishment.

What if along the way, some of these criminals were enrolled in diversion program like Antioch's REACH? What if some of these folks were helped by the Youth Intervention Network? What if some of the county's anti-violence workers in the Health Services program were able to break through the hard shell of the middle-school students prone to "act out" through disruptive behavior? What if somewhere along the way, they met someone who was able to put them on a path toward stability?

I'm not saying these proactive intervention and prevention programs will make all criminals disappear; but it costs less to implement these programs than to house a prisoner for years and years. As members of my East County Gang Task Force affirm — it takes intervention, prevention and suppression working together to slow down the state's rapidly growing prison population.

The future is going to require the Board of

Supervisors to make some hard choices — in most instances, choices we don't want to make — and it's going to cause pain as we are forced to live within our means. Perhaps that is why past Boards were reluctant to do it. The bottom line: We have to do it now.

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