

Dodd talks of reform at city health center

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MIDDLETOWN — U. S. Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn., is hopeful a national health-care plan will in place before the end of the year, and he believes community health centers like Middletown's may play a key role.

Following a tour of the Community Health Center in the North End on Wednesday, Dodd met with members of the Connecticut Primary Care Association who represent the 10 community health centers in the state.

"Community health centers provide a structure that has been tremendously successful," Dodd told the membership. "I'm very confident they will be a major vehicle in health-care reform."

Adequate delivery of health services is a significant problem, Dodd stressed, noting that in Ridgefield, an affluent community, only 80 percent of the children are immunized. "It's a problem that transcends income," he said. "We have a come and get it system in America," commented Richard Jacobson, executive director of CPCA. "We need to get

out to where the people are," as community health centers do, he said. "And when we do that, there are costs attached. If you define the benefit package in a traditional way, our approach will fall out of the package."

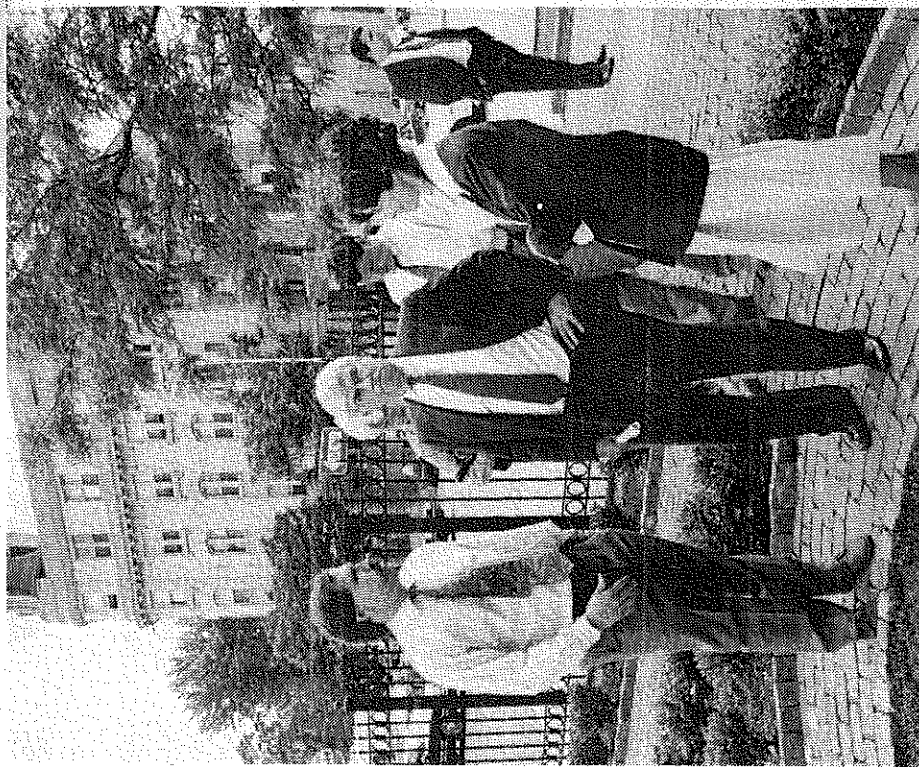
He said the 10 centers in Connecticut provide care at 32 sites. In 1990, there were 225,000 visits by 70,000 people. This year, 350,000 visits have been made by 125,000 people. "We have a tremendous ability to reach out to people," Jacobson said.

There are 280,000 people in Connecticut on Medicare, he said. In addition, 250,000 are uninsured, and 35,000 to 40,000 are on general assistance. "Provide an adequate system for those who don't have it," he told Dodd.

Dodd warned that no plan will meet every need but he sees bipartisan support for change. "There is a consensus developing. I didn't think six months ago we would have. There is a strong desire to move forward and get away from the absolutely incredible mess we have now."

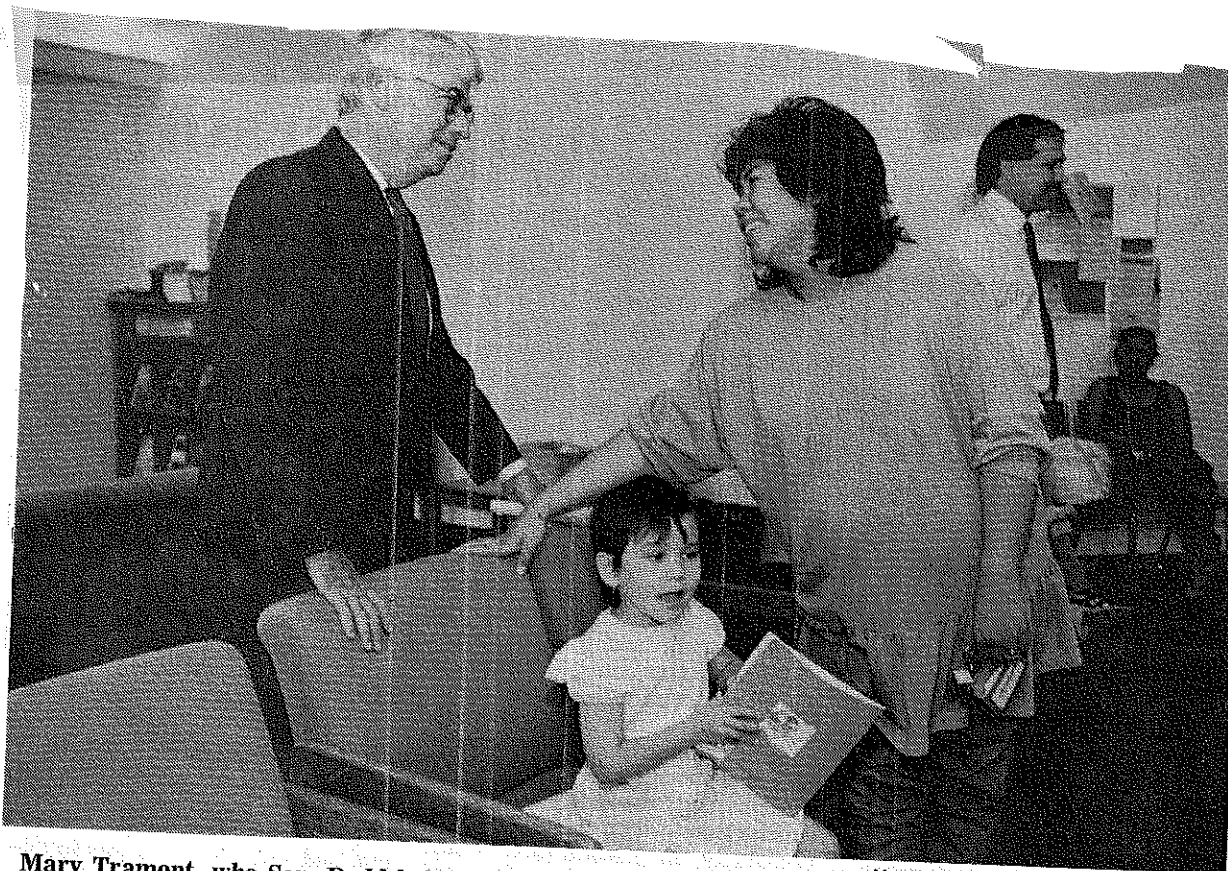
He called health-care reform

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Martin Cooke/Middletown Press Staff

U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd, center, visits with Mark Masselli, left, president and CEO of the Community Health Center in Middletown and Margaret Flinter, vice president of the center Wednesday. They met in the Luis Lopez Memorial Herb Garden, which the center created on the corner of Main and Green streets.



Mary Tramont, who Sen. Dodd helped to get a visa to emigrate from the Philippines nine years ago, thanks him Wednesday in the waiting room at the Community Health Center in the North End in Middletown. Tramont's daughter is Sara Grace, 5. Tramont has a 7-year-old son, Christopher, who was named after Dodd.

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Dodd visits city health center

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"the single largest social policy item to be debated by the Congress. Social Security and Medicare were about how to disperse the checks."

Dodd said he supports the delay in releasing the plan until September, to be certain it is ready for release, but added if reform is not enacted by the end of December "we'll be getting into a campaign year and that becomes too weird. And if we miss a year, it could collapse."

Dental care will be included in the plan, Dodd said, "but it may not be at the level you want." He said dentists had lobbied to be excluded from Medicare. "They

found that was a huge mistake. Now they want preventive, acute and restorative care included," he said.

Dodd said he saw the need for preventive and acute care but questioned restorative work, such as braces.

"The elderly have no coverage for dentures, and without dentures, they can't eat. It's a real public health problem," commented Janet Skane Stearn of the Southwest Community Health Center in Bridgeport.

Compromises will be inevitable, Dodd said. "When this plan gets announced, that's only one-third of the journey, which will be long

and painful. My hope is that plan will include preventive and acute dental care, but I'm telling you now that if it's only preventive, I'll support it. It's too wonderful an opportunity to see it evaporate."

A plan once in place can be improved, he noted, saying he would like to consider covering non-traditional elements such as environmental health, nutrition, aerobics and body manipulation. "We have a good chance to begin those things together," he said.

Accompanied by Mark Masselli, president and CEO of the Community Health Center, Dodd toured the facilities and spoke to patients and doctors.