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# Opinion Editorial

## Never surrender

There's an unattributed saying that sort of fits our present circumstances with our Governor: "It's often satisfying to stone a martyr, even if we admire him." Governor Owens' veto of our hard fought managed care reform package has a lot of us breathing fire and gathering stones. The staff room growling says, here is yet another Republican Governor who has sided with the insurance industry against medicine. But let us not cast those stones. His unexpected support for Rep. McGihon's Health Care Reform-Blue Ribbon Panel, even though he had slam-dunked its 2005 predecessor, was, to be fair, part of a string of admirable stands this out-going Governor has made that has brought plenty of friendly fire down on his positions. The anti-government "conservatives" vilified his principled stand for the C and D referenda, and his unflinching support during the campaign drew withering national criticism from the tax haters, like Grover Norquist and Dick Armey. He has called yet more fire on his head for his support for the no smoking law, with conservative blogs railing about individual rights, a favorite refuge of the neo-libertarian Rs who resist everything from seatbelt laws to immunizations. He directed his Insurance Commissioner to put conditions on the United-Pacificare deal, which may over time, and with some hard work,

bring that huge imbalance into a reasonable orbit. And he will step into the fire, right with us, in a very tough primary fight for one of our own, Dr./Senator Kiki Traylor, taking on the same national hardliners who would side with the HMOs in the name of "free enterprise," and continue to choke off the air supply to Colorado's health care lifelines in the name of "fiscal conservatism." This is demonstrative more of common ground than the theory of strange bedfellows.

Besides, we may yet have the final say on what's fair and what's not between us and the plans. We will be stepping up this election cycle, and supporting our many friends on both sides of the aisle who recognize the legitimate role of the state-as-referee and arbiter of what's fair and what's cheating and stealing. Surely the thought has dawned on most of us that not only is this an election year, the Governor's seat is an open question. We will have lots of questions for the candidates, and all of you will know their answers long before you have to choose between them.

We obviously believe that when there are dangerous imbalances in the health care market the bullies will always take your lunch money. With inadequate, loopholed, outdated laws still on the books, predatory conduct becomes a state sanctioned license to steal. It's broke, and we're going to fix it.

Are we mad about the veto? You bet. Are we hanging it up? No way. As Ahnuld said, "Ah'll vee bahk."

To borrow another nugget, "democracy is a process by which the people are free to choose who will get the blame." I would rather fix problems, not blame, whenever that is possible. We are learning, as we elevate our game to the next level, that this isn't just cynical realpolitik. Pragmatism doesn't necessarily compromise principles. It is learning the "Art of the Possible." We aren't condemning Caesar with faint praise. We should humbly acknowledge that, even in the tribalized partisan world of politics, our adversaries have redeeming virtues and our allies are not without their own vices. In our world of medicine, which is deeply embedded in the competing universes of politics and economics, we are also learning that give and take is a given, and our bargaining power comes from what we make possible—through grassroots muscle channeled into thoughtful, practical positions that put our patients ahead of self interest, and clinical, demonstrable truths that confront the anti-doctor urban myths and sacred cows.

But, the most important lesson of all, which is, to borrow from Churchill yet again, is "Never surrender. Never, Never, Never."