

Grant helps health care in county

But \$300,000 is not a cure-all

By Joe Hanel

Herald Denver Bureau

A \$300,000 grant from Con-gress for health care in La Plata County will not end the county's health-care crisis, but it helps, a Mercy hospital official said Fri-day.

The grant goes to Mercy Health Foundation for a commu-nity health clinic. Applicants had asked for \$1.2 million, said Karen Midkiff, the foundation's chief de-velopment officer.

But Midkiff is happy with the award.

"The thing that's so important is they got Durango covered in the federal budget," she said.

Midkiff credited Rep. John Salazar, D-Manassa, and Sens. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and Ken Salazar, D-Colo., with helping win approval of the grant. It was part of a budget bill that Congress sent to President Bush on Thurs-day.

Last week's grant will not be enough to build a new clinic, Midkiff said. Mercy officials will talk with community leaders in-volved in health care about how to spend the money. It was ear-marked for construction of a health clinic, but the money can be used for equipment, as well.

Troubles hit a crisis stage in La Plata County when Valley-Wide Health Systems closed its clinic in DENVER – Southwest Coloradans have another chance to share their thoughts on health care with state gov-ernment leaders. But they'll have to get up early.

Gov. Bill Ritter is sending representatives to Durango on Tuesday to ask what people want from the health-care re-form bills that will be consid-ered by the Legislature next year.

The meeting will be held from 7 to 9:30 a.m. at the DoubleTree Hotel.

Joan Henneberry, director of the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, and Cody Belzley, Ritter's

See **Forum, 7A**

March, leaving its patients with-out primary-care physicians.

In response, Mercy Regional Medical Center opened a clinic –

Grant: Mercy plans to ask city, county to renew grant contributions

Continued from [1A](#)

Health Services Clinic, 1800 East Third Ave. – to provide limited care and medication management. La Plata County and the city of Durango each kicked in \$200,000 to subsidize the clinic.

The hospital plans to ask the Board of County Commissioners and Durango City Council to renew the grants, Midkiff said.

The clinic has made great strides in getting people access to care, she said. It is staffed and has appointments available.

Midkiff said federal funding of the full \$1.2 million grant would have almost solved the county's primary-care troubles.

"We are grateful for what we did receive, especially in a time we know the budgets are tight," she said.

Last week, a consultant recommended what city and county officials should do next. The suggestions include helping doctors get Certified Rural Health Clinic status to boost their payment rates from the federal government, hiring new health-care providers, and asking voters to back a tax increase to pay for health services. Voters rejected a tax increase to create a health district in 2006