

The Durango Herald 11/08/2007, Page A05

Congressional bill would provide money for health clinic Mercy Health Foundation to receive \$300,000 for Durango building

Herald Staff Report

The Mercy Health Foundation is scheduled to receive \$ 300,000 from a congressional appropriations bill toward the construction and equipping of a 50,000- square- foot community health clinic in Durango.

The clinic will serve primary-care patients who were left without a doctor when ValleyWide Health Services closed its medical clinic in Durango at the end of March. Voters in March 2006 rejected an effort to form a tax-supported health-service district.

A consultant coincidentally delivered a study to La Plata County and Durango officials on Wednesday on how to meet the primary-care crisis.

Among the suggestions: Obtain Certified Rural Health Clinic status for existing providers, which brings increased remuneration for Medicare and Medicaid payments; hire new health- care providers, including a physician and a physician's assistant; and reconsider a taxing mechanism to pay for services.

"This appropriations bill includes major benefits to rural communities," said Rep. John Salazar, D-Manassa, who helped La Plata County become a designated Health Professional Shortage Area, a step toward acquiring funding. "It provides funding for critical-access hospitals and creates health-care networks for Coloradans in rural areas."

House members approved the appropriations bill by a two-thirds majority late Tuesday. The Senate was expected to approve the bill Wednesday.

The two chambers had agreed on the amount in an earlier conference committee meeting.

Other Colorado health-care facilities benefiting from the appropriations bill were the Grand Junction Medical Education Center, \$ 440,000; Northwest Colorado Visiting Nurse Association, \$ 170,000; and the San Luis Valley Regional Medical Center, \$170,000.

"This appropriations bill includes major benefits to rural communities."

Rep. John Salazar, D-Manassa