

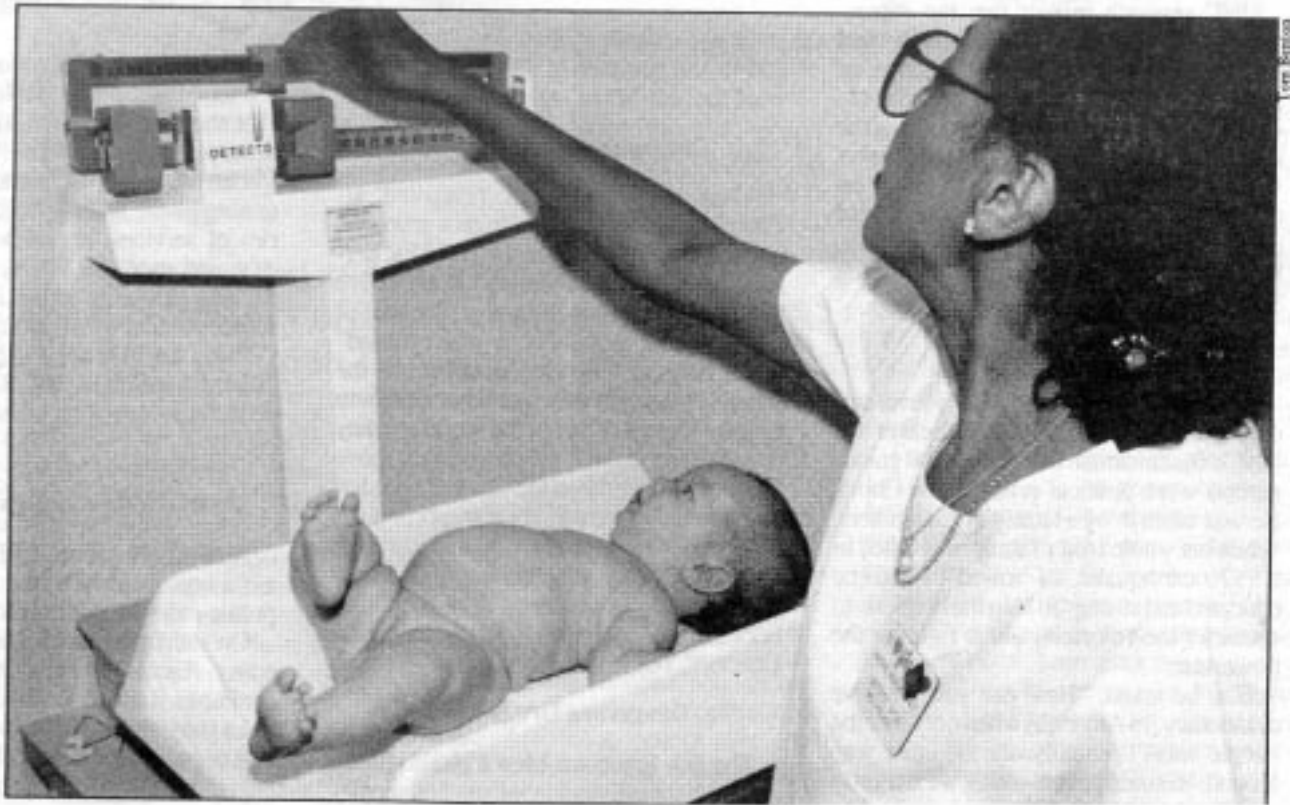
1993, November

“Single Payer” Beats Other Health Plans

Health Care in the South

- The infant mortality rate in the South is higher than the rest of the country, and in some rural areas it is higher than in Haiti — the poorest country in the world.
- Southerners paid 8.3% of their income for health care in 1980, and 11% in 1991; both are higher than the national average.
- Qualifying for medicaid in the South is difficult because the maximum yearly income for a family of three to qualify is \$4400.
- The low unionization rate in the South means if you want higher wages, you'll probably lose your health plan. Also two out of three jobs are now temporary or contract labor (with no benefits)

(source: Former Georgia Representative, Rita Valenti)



By Mia Kirsh

Is the Clinton health care reform package a step forward for Americans, especially the uninsured poor, or could it be a step backward? Many in the progressive community wrestled with this question at the recent NC Fair Share Convention held on October 30th in Raleigh. The problem: should we support Clinton's plan as a needed first step toward improving

1995, May

How I Survived AIDS-Related Pneumonia in a North Carolina Prison

Prism Exclusive!

by Eddie Hatcher

In 1988, Eddie Hatcher and another Native American, Timothy Jacobs, became internationally known for their takeover of the local newspaper in Robeson County. They took this action as a desperate attempt to draw attention to county officials' involvement in drug trafficking and discriminatory treatment of minority citizens. A federal jury acquitted Hatcher and Jacobs, but subsequently the state tried and convicted Hatcher on kidnapping charges. While Jacobs accepted a plea bargain agreement, Hatcher was sentenced to an 18-year prison term.

Hatcher remained politically active while in prison. He was stabbed in the lung a couple of years ago by another prisoner who has claimed that he was acting on the suggestion of a prison official. Several months ago, Hatcher was diagnosed with AIDS and finally was released from prison. However, state officials did not give a clear reason for his release.

Hatcher gives the following description of the prison medical treatment he received recently:



On January 12, 1995, while being housed in solitary confinement at the Iredell County prison unit in Statesville, I began to experience a dull pain in the lower part of my right chest each time I took a deep breath. For several days I attempted to overlook the pain, thinking it might be a sore muscle or something unimportant.

Approximately four days after the pain began, I informed the prison nurse of the pain and shortness of breath. The nurse told me that I had a hiatal hernia, and I was given a bottle of Maalox. After several bottles of Maalox, and another week of worsening pain and shortness of breath, I approached another nurse. I told this nurse that I felt as if I had some congestion in the lower part of my chest, and that if I could get it broken up it would go away. She advised me very quickly to take a “cold pill” which had absolutely nothing to do with chest congestion.

Each day the pain and shortness of breath would intensify. I could feel my breath becoming shorter. After about three weeks, the pain and shortness of

I arrived at the hospital emergency room in shackles and chains, almost unable to walk.

breath had become so bad I had almost stopped eating. I quickly learned that if I lay on my right side, it helped the pain ease up and it seemed I could breath easier. I began to hurt so bad that I would refrain from getting up to eat.

1994, March

SMART CONSUMER

Let's Eliminate the Sales Tax on Food

by Jim Jensen

Of all the many ways in which the poor and the disadvantaged are treated unfairly, North Carolina's sales tax on food is one of the worst. It is one bit of unfairness that could — and should — be changed.

It should be easy to remove the tax on food. Various measures have been proposed to eliminate, or at the very least reduce, the tax. There are currently two bills in the legislature that would change the sales tax structure as it affects food.

The best argument against a sales tax on food is obvious: A sales tax is probably the most regressive tax there is. That is, the lower a family's income, the more of its income the family must spend on things subject to the tax. Typically, according to *Citizens for Tax Justice*, low-income families spend three-quarters of their income on things subject to sales tax. Middle-income families spend less than half their income on things subject to sales tax, and the richest families spend only about one-sixth of their income on taxed goods.

Put another way, a 6 percent sales tax is the equivalent of an income tax with a 4.5 percent rate for the poor, a 3 percent rate for the middle class, and a 1 percent rate for the rich. That's about as regressive and unfair as a tax can be, and the reason for sporadic — and unsuccessful — attempts at substantial tax relief for the poor by reducing the tax, at least on an essential like food. We do, after all, have to eat. Food is hardly discretionary spending. But at present, it seems more likely that the legislature will be successful in attempts to eliminate the intangibles tax, a step that would obviously benefit the well-to-do. The fact that observers think this small tax on stocks, bonds, mutual fund (holdings and other “intangible” assets may be eliminated, while) attempts to cut the tax on food may fail or be postponed, reflects the reality of the political power structure in our state.

Organizations such as North Carolina Fair Share are working hard to change this situation. Removal of the sales tax on food is one of the top goals on Fair Share's agenda, along with promotion of the single-payer health plan. But it won't be easy to accomplish. All food had been exempted from the sales tax once before — in 1941 — but the tax was reimposed in 1961, specifically to provide more money for education. Since then the sales tax has been going up rather steadily.

1995, April

On the occasion of our fifth anniversary, it's worth asking: What is the character of the *Prism*?

We have always attempted to publish items on local issues and activities or local aspects of national and global issues. However, we depend mostly on local people to volunteer to write and it generally takes more legwork to do a local story. And what happens nationally and internationally is more and more related to what is going on locally. In essence, there is no separation between local and non-local. NAFTA is a good illustration of how local global can be.

Nevertheless, there's been a noticeable pattern of *The Prism* doing an article about something strictly local and then several days later the same basic story comes out in one of the local for-profit papers. This happened with the story about the uncertainty about Internationalist bookstore's future. It happened with the article about the specific ways that the Smart Start program benefits children. It happened with *The Prism's* scoop that Oscar-winning Empowerment Project was moving to Orange County from California.