

STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN

October 25, 1985

About five years ago as part of a district trip, I made a drop by visit and tour of the Virginia Garcia Center.

After the introductory briefing by the medical staff, I was taken through the facility which included several examination rooms, the business office, the reception area and so forth. I remember that there were patients there that day. The staff took me into one examination room and I had a lengthy conversation with a female doctor who described the kind of clientele that the Garcia center serves, largely a farm labor work force and also members of the local Hispanic community. She described in some detail the chronic medical problems and very real medical needs the Hispanic community has in Washington County, even though Washington County is the most affluent county in the state. She was exceptionally dedicated and very impressive.

We finished the conversation and I moved down the hall looking into other examination rooms. Then I remember that she called out to me and I turned; she was in the doorway of the first examination room and she was asking me to return to that examination room to see a patient she had just brought in. I walked into the room to find her cradling an infant in her arms. The child was about two feet in length, obviously something very wrong had happened, but I couldn't tell what. The baby was crying and had a very peculiar, high pitched, metallic quality to its voice. The voice was not terribly loud, although it seemed like the infant was going through quite an effort to cry. I turned to the doctor and asked what was wrong with the child. She said, "Congressman, this child is three months old" (even though it was only about two feet long and looked like a newborn child) "and has suffered irreversible brain damage as a result of malnutrition."

She went on to explain that this was the child of a migrant worker, the mother, who was in her teens had been working in the fields, and the baby had come down with a case of dysentery. The mother had heard that rice water helped settle the stomach when you had dysentery. She had no medical advice, no day care facilities, no ongoing source of quality information available in an out reach way. And in consequence, the mother had continued to feed the baby rice water for a period of weeks, upon weeks, upon weeks. The resulting malnutrition had caused this state and it was only when this irreversible state had been reached that the child had been brought in. This is a tragic and devastating story, right in the midst of the greatest amount of affluence in any county or any portion in the state of Oregon. It demonstrates the kind of additional work that is required in the field of health care for a population in desperate need of medical information and medical care.