

California's Next Governor Could Transform Healthcare— or Gut It. *Becerra vs. Hilton*

Featuring

Michael Lighty

President, Healthy California Now



This time on Code WACK!

The upcoming governor's race could shape the future of health care for nearly 40 million Californians. With former **U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra** facing **Republican Steve Hilton**, the election is raising critical questions about whether California will move closer to a single-payer healthcare system—or further away.

Michael Lighty, president of Healthy California Now, joins us to break down what the primary results mean, where the candidates stand on healthcare reform, and what's at stake for the future of universal healthcare in California.

This is the first of two episodes with Michael Lighty.

Check out the [Transcript](#) and Show Notes for more!

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You've followed Democratic candidate Xavier Becerra's healthcare record for years. Was there ever a moment when you thought, "This is someone who could become a real champion for single payer?"

Lighty: "Well, he was (when he was in Congress) pretty well informed, honestly, on the policy, and obviously the political realities of pursuing Medicare for All at the federal level. And there certainly was a time when he was in Congress, that I thought he could be a champion of it, and we certainly tried to to move him into that position.

Oftentimes, when members of Congress, (or at least on the Democratic side), are in leadership positions, they back off strong advocacy for, you know, more controversial issues, and that may reflect deference to the speaker or the leader, maybe for other reasons as well. So that's what we ultimately confronted. ."

We had some hopes that maybe [when he was] at HHS we could make progress, but you know President Biden was just misinformed and dead set against it, and so there wasn't really any room there. I didn't necessarily hold Secretary Becerra responsible for that as much as ... President Biden's craven approach to the healthcare industry.

"... what [Becerra] was saying in the last few weeks of the campaign was, '*we need to figure out a path forward to get there.*' And I don't think he said that that path exists now, but that we should figure out a way, particularly once we have a friendly administration, to achieve universal health care in California. To me, that is an openness to what we've been trying to pursue with the 770 process.

Helpful Links

[Healthy California Now](#)

[Michael Lighty](#), *The Sanders Institute*

[SB770, Guaranteed Health Care](#)

[In California Governor's Race, Voters Face Stark Choice on Immigrant Healthcare](#), *KFF Health News*

[In California Governor's Race, Xavier Becerra Walks Away From Single-Payer](#), *Capital & Main*

Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#).

Guest Biography - Michael Lighty

Michael Lighty, President, [Healthy California Now](#), has organized, advocated and developed policy for single-payer, Medicare for All nationally and in California for over 30 years.

He is a founding Fellow of the [Sanders Institute](#), and he was the Healthcare Constituency Director for Bernie 2020. He is a consultant for the National Union of Healthcare Workers.

Most recently, he co-wrote and was a leader in the successful campaign to enact CA SB 770. He worked for 25 years for the California Nurses Association/ National Nurses United, including as the director of public policy.

Host Biography: Brenda Gazzar

Brenda Gazzar, the host and co-producer of **Code WACK!**, has produced over 300 weekly podcast episodes, topping 400,000 downloads. A skilled interviewer and storyteller, Brenda brings nuance, curiosity, and clarity to every conversation.

Brenda has worked as a multilingual and award-winning reporter with more than two decades of experience in California and the Middle East.

Her work has been published by Reuters, Ms. Magazine, USA Today, Los Angeles Daily News, the Orange County Register, The Wrap, The Jerusalem Post, Cairo Times, and numerous other publications. She speaks Spanish, Hebrew, and moderate Arabic and is the recipient of national, state, and regional awards.

Brenda also enjoys being a life coach, helping people align with their purpose so they feel fulfilled while achieving their boldest dreams. Brenda's work is grounded in a belief that systemic change and personal growth go hand in hand — and she's here for both.

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