

September 28, 2007

The rising cost of health care is a painful topic of discussion for many families these days.

Those rising costs and reductions in employer-provided health coverage mean working American families can't see doctors when they should and can't get medicines when they need them.

That's why, as we approach the expiration date for a decade-old program that provides health care to over one million low-income children in California and over six million nationally, reauthorizing it would seem pretty straightforward.

And yet, President Bush stands in the way by threatening to veto a bipartisan bill from Congress which would provide health care coverage to 10 million low-income American children.

The bill has support from Republicans and Democrats in both the House and the Senate and would protect health care coverage for the 1.4 million California children who rely on it. It would also cover 600,000 more low-income Golden State children who lack health insurance and are currently eligible for the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known in California as Healthy Families.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program is set to expire this Sunday.

Congress has done its part to protect children's health care. It is now up to the President.

If President Bush carries through with his veto threat it will be clear that he is playing politics with our children by putting at risk the health care of nearly 45,000 children in Contra Costa, Alameda, and San Joaquin Counties – and hundreds of thousands more across the state.

Ironically, President Bush says he supports the State Children's Health Insurance Program and provided funding in his budget. But the budget he proposed doesn't even provide enough funds to cover the children currently enrolled in the program, let alone any of the millions of uninsured children that need basic health coverage.

The President can't have it both ways.

Covering the children of those working families is the reason the bipartisan SCHIP program was created in 1997. And the vast majority of the children insured under SCHIP are exactly the ones Congress had in mind when the program was created. They are in families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid, but not high enough to afford private coverage.

In fact, about 70 percent of the children who will gain or retain coverage under this legislation would be from a family of four earning about \$41,000 a year or less.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program is valuable, successful, and efficient. It costs less than \$3.50 a day to cover a child through SCHIP. And SCHIP serves as a safety net for children whose illnesses and injuries otherwise would be treated in emergency rooms, the most expensive way to treat routine medical concerns, with the bills coming due to all Americans in higher taxes and insurance premiums.

As we approach the deadline for this program, President Bush should stop the scare tactics and sign the bipartisan compromise from Congress. He should think of the children.