

No Sick Child Left Behind

Southern Baptist leader says it's about time all U.S. children had health insurance.

Madison Trammel | posted 4/26/2007 08:52AM

Departing from typical conservative advocacy, the Southern Baptists' top lobbyist has joined an interfaith group calling on Congress to extend health-care coverage to every American child.

Richard Land, president of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, gathered with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders at a March 6 press conference to address the "moral imperative" of health care for children. "Some say [health care coverage] is all well and good, but we should focus on the main thing, pro-life issues," Land said. "I say the focus on health care is pro-life. We're not just pro-life from conception to birth."

Land and the other leaders endorsed reauthorization and greater federal funding of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Begun in 1997, SCHIP faces little renewal opposition. However, according to People Improving Communities Through Organizing, more than \$60 billion over five years will be needed to cover all of America's 9 million uninsured children. SCHIP's original budget was \$24 billion over 10 years.

The push for universal health care for children comes in the wake of new legislation around the country. Massachusetts and Vermont have passed initiatives designed to cover the uninsured, and more than a dozen states are considering similar measures. Not since President Clinton's plan failed in 1994 has so much nationwide attention been given to health care reform.

"If you look at poll evidence, there is support for health care among evangelicals," said John Green, senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "It has not been one of the top priorities in the evangelical community, but there is support for those ideas."

However, some evangelical leaders criticize federal and state assistance for diminishing parents' and businesses' responsibility to provide insurance for dependents. Other critics say such assistance fails to address the core issue of spiraling provider costs.

"Our health system is badly broken. It costs too much; too many people are uninsured," said David Stevens, ceo of the Christian Medical Association. "[But] we need a program that is not going to turn over children and the elderly to the government. ... The Bible teaches us to take care of our families, and that we have the primary responsibilities."

Land sees no need for personal responsibility and government assistance to conflict. "If we can unite around anything," he said, "surely we can unite around the responsibility ... to deliver health care to the nation's children."

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[People Improving Communities Through Organizing reported](#) that on March 15, the Senate Budget Committee approved \$50 billion over five years for the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

[Richard Land](#), president of the SEC's [Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission](#), spoke on behalf of an interfaith coalition in a March 6 [press conference](#).