

## Children need health coverage

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AS CO-CHAIR of Peninsula Interfaith Action, a federation of 31 Christian, Jewish, and Universalist Unitarian congregations, it is important for me to make our community aware of the historic opportunity we have to win health coverage for all children. Currently, the California State Legislature and the U.S. Congress are considering legislation that if signed into law would provide all children in California with access to affordable health coverage.

For many families, California's Healthy Families Program, which is supported by the federal State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), is the only affordable option for health insurance for their children. As a person of faith, I believe we are judged by how we treat the least among us, especially our children. We should not tolerate politicians playing politics with the lives of our children — innocent children.

For Nicole Barber, mother of three and a leader of Stockton PACT, one of our sister organizations, the Healthy Families Program is a godsend. This summer, when her son needed a life-saving emergency surgery, she did not have to think twice about it. "Without Healthy Families, I would have had to sell my home to pay for the surgery and DeVontae's follow-up care," she said.

Nicole and her children are not the only ones in this situation. There are 9 million children, currently uninsured in the United States. With strong reauthorization of SCHIP, we would be able to cover 5 million children with health insurance.

Are we willing to turn our backs on our children? It appears that President Bush is. The president has threatened to veto any legislation that Congress puts forth to cover more uninsured children. SCHIP has been a great success with strong bipartisan support since it began. Governor Schwarzenegger and other Republican governors support the SCHIP legislation. The governor and California lawmakers are considering legislation that would expand the Healthy Families children's health insurance program and make it easier for families to enroll their children and obtain affordable health insurance. These changes would help the 763,000 uninsured children in California.

Over the past year, people of faith have been at the forefront of the campaign in support of children's health coverage. Considerable progress has been made, but now we are in the final stretch. The faith community expects Congress and the president to say YES to cover our children before SCHIP ends on Sept. 30. Please call your Congressperson and Senator and encourage them to support a strong SCHIP reauthorization. Our children are counting on you!

Diana Reddy lives in Redwood City.

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