

Rev. Mier invited to D.C. in push for child health care

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Washington -

One local man is on the front line in the attempt to secure health insurance for children.

Fall River First Baptist Church Rev. Donald Mier Wednesday stood shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., along with other religious leaders to voice their support for the federally funded State Children's Health Insurance Program.

After speaking at what Mier described as a well-attended press conference in the Capitol building, the reverend explained that he was there to build support for the passing of the bill that would extend the S-CHIP program, which pays for medical care for children in low-income families.

The funding has received approval from the U.S. House of Representatives, but concerns exist that President George W. Bush will veto the bill.

Shortly after the press conference ended, Mier explained why he offered to support the extension of the program.

"S-CHIP is so clearly an issue of morality, not politics," Mier said. "That's why this is such an important issue."

In Massachusetts, S-CHIP covers 190,640 children, yet 106,570 remain uninsured. The program is also a critical funding source for Massachusetts health care reform law passed last summer.

After initially seeking in March to persuade Congress to expand funding to \$60 billion, a compromise was reached to supply the program with \$35 billion.

That amount will cover the currently enrolled 6.6 million children and cover an additional 4 million nationwide. Funding for S-CHIP expires Sept. 30.

Mier was in Washington to represent 2,000 clergy, the United Interfaith Action group and the PICO National Network.

"Hopefully it will make a difference," Mier said of the far-ranging support. "We're taking one step at a time, speaking gently with love."

Along with speaking with some of the nation's most distinguished, Mier was also in Washington to deliver a letter to the president.

The correspondence expresses the concerns of not continuing the S-CHIP program.

"As faith communities spanning the major American religious traditions, we are dismayed and deeply disappointed that you have threatened to veto legislation designed to improve the health of our nation's children. With children back in school and S-CHIP set to expire on September 30, people in congregations across the country are asking why the President would go out of his way to block an effort to cover uninsured children," the letter reads in part.

As he wrapped up his day, Mier said Wednesday's experience proved to be an opportunity of a lifetime.

"It was amazing and humbling," Mier said. "They treated us like royalty. But it was very humbling and stressful, of course."

Mier said he was planning on returning to Fall River Wednesday afternoon with new challenges.

"Tomorrow begins a new day," he said.

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