

Religious leaders convene to promote expanded health coverage for children

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[NCC News] Religious leaders convene to promote expanded health coverage for children

Washington, D.C., March 6, 2007--At a time when pressure is building to respond to the problem of uninsured children, religious leaders from across the country came together today to emphasize the moral imperative of covering all kids. This year, Congress has an opportunity to make history by reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and expand access to insurance to millions of uninsured children.

"There are hundreds of verses in the Bible about caring for others, especially children," said the Rev. Bob Edgar, General Secretary, National Council of Churches USA (NCC). "It is gratifying to read a recent opinion poll that suggests most Americans are even willing to pay higher taxes so others might have health care. Providing health care to our children in this country is a good start."

"The scandal of millions of American children lacking health care coverage is an indictment of our cultural priorities. Now is the time for all of us to insist that children are given the right to live the lives for which they were created. When we can resolve that together we will meet the needs of children as a top national priority," said Rev. Dr. Eileen W. Lindner, Deputy General Secretary of the NCC.

The Revs. Edgar and Lindner were among religious leaders from major faith traditions who convened in Washington today to promote health coverage for the more than 9 million uninsured children in the country. The faith community considers it a moral obligation to provide health coverage for our nation's children and is calling on Congress to make this a top priority.

"Surely in a nation as rich as ours, we can find ways to make certain that all our nation's children receive the healthcare they need," said Rev. Dr. Richard Land, President of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

"Our children are the most precious trust from God Almighty. It is our collective religious obligation to make sure that they are provided appropriate health care, and possibilities of spiritual and intellectual growth. If we fail in taking care of some of them it is like failing to take care of all of them," said Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, National Director of the Islamic Society of North America.

"The health system used by some, (e.g. those who have financial access), is among the best in the world, yet it is inaccessible to an increasing number of people in this country, especially our children," said Dr. Miriam Burnett, Medical Director of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. "The attainment of healthcare coverage for all children is necessary for the mission of public health, for social justice to occur and for the achievement of Optimal Health."

"All children are created in God's image and deserve the blessing of good health," said Rev. Michael-Ray Mathews of PICO National Network.

"Keeping children healthy is a fundamental value for the faith community and leaving 9 million uninsured children is morally unacceptable for our nation."

"We have the means and tools to help every child access quality, affordable health insurance. Now all we need is the moral vision and political fortitude," said Rabbi David Saperstein, Director and Counsel of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

"When G-d declared in Genesis, that we are all made in G-d's image, G-d would never have imagined that we would live in a wealthy society in which 47 million people did not have basic health insurance. That is just not the way we should treat people who are made in the image of G-d," said Rabbi Steve Gutow, Executive Director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

"PICO has brought 400 clergy and families to Washington to demonstrate that there is broad and deep grassroots support in America's faith communities for swift action to cover all uninsured children in the United States. Our country is united around covering every child. If we can find the money for other priorities, we should find the \$60 billion needed over the next five years to reach all children," said the Rev. John Baumann, S.J., Executive Director of PICO National Network.

"Our faith teaches us that access to health care is a human right. We have a moral obligation to make sure that all of our children get the health care they need, when they need it," said Kathy Curran, Interim Director, Office of Domestic Social Development, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Families USA is the national organization for health care consumers. It is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advocates for high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans.

The NCC is the ecumenical voice of America's Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, historic African American and traditional peace churches. These 35 communions have 45 million faithful members in 100,000 congregations in all 50 states.

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