

## Letter to the editor on children's healthcare

(First published in the Palm Beach Post on October 6, 2007).

The President's veto of a popular, bipartisan program to get healthcare for uninsured kids was, simply stated, wrong. We appreciate the Palm Beach Post's accurate coverage of the battle over the reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Unfortunately, the letter to the editor by President Bush's deputy secretary of the Department of Health Tevi Troy [Oct 3] did not rise to the same standard of accuracy. We would like to set the record straight.

The bipartisan legislation that the President vetoed would reauthorize SCHIP for the 6.6 million kids already enrolled and reduce the number of uninsured children nationwide by about 4 million. In Florida, the legislation could more than double the number of children enrolled in SCHIP - from approximately 224,000 to over 600,000. This legislation would reduce the number of uninsured American children while adhering to pay-as-you-go or PAYGO budget rules that keep America from going further into debt.

SCHIP covers children from low-income homes who currently do not have healthcare coverage. It is not a program for the wealthy. The program was created in 1997 to provide healthcare coverage to children of the "working poor;" families who do not qualify for Medicaid, but cannot afford to purchase healthcare coverage on their own. Last year, another 700,000 children from these families lost healthcare coverage. This is a growing crisis for children in our community and throughout the country.

The President's claim, reiterated by Deputy Secretary Troy in his letter to the editor, that this legislation would expand coverage to families earning \$83,000 per year is false. The bill does not change eligibility requirements for SCHIP. It would expand coverage to more children by giving states the resources they need to enroll uninsured children who are already eligible, so qualified kids are not denied coverage or put on a waiting list. The program specifically targets funding to low-income children and reduces federal support for future coverage of children in higher income brackets. No state currently covers children from families who earn \$83,000.

SCHIP does not move kids out of private insurance plans. The vast majority of those kids currently enrolled did not have access to health coverage before joining the program. For the children who enroll in SCHIP, their coverage is a far cry from "socialized medicine." Currently, 48 states run their SCHIP program through a private insurance provider. Private doctors and private health plans deliver medical services through SCHIP. The program has the backing of private insurers, including the largest private insurance advocacy group in the country -America's Health Insurance Plans.

President Bush's proposed alternative to the bill Congress passed would authorize only an additional \$5 billion over the next five years. This is not enough to sustain the number of children currently getting healthcare through SCHIP, let alone expand coverage to additional eligible kids. America is the land of innovative solutions, of common sense, and of

moral integrity. If there is any issue that should generate consensus, it is getting American children healthcare. It costs less than \$3.50 a day to cover a child through the SCHIP program - a small investment to put our kids on the path to a healthy, successful future. We urge our colleagues to join us in voting to override the President's veto.

Congressman Tim Mahoney (FL-16), Congressman Robert Wexler (FL-19), and Congressman Ron Klein (FL-22).