

Letters to the editor for Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2009
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HOUSE CONSIDERS SCHIP

It's a vote that may directly affect our kids

We're poised to take an important step to help a lot of children.

Today, the U.S. House of Representatives will renew efforts to help expand health care coverage to millions of our nation's children. The reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, also known as SCHIP, would be a promising start to ensuring all children in our country have the health care they need and deserve. Across the country, SCHIP provides health insurance to kids of families that don't already qualify for Medical Assistance, but still cannot afford private health insurance.

Providing health insurance to children is a smart investment -- one that can pay dividends for the next 80 years. Without insurance, children's health problems are ignored, care is delayed and diseases progress. For kids, timing is everything. Early interventions can help keep kids on the right path --healthy, growing, learning. Moreover, early detection and intervention of childhood diseases can significantly reduce health care problems in adulthood, when costs will be even greater.

We all like happy endings, especially when it comes to stories about kids. This makes a recent case here in Minnesota all the more difficult to hear. A child developed headaches and fatigue, but the parents did not seek medical care because they were uninsured. Months later, with symptoms too severe to ignore, the child was finally brought into the hospital and was diagnosed with a massive brain tumor.

This story has a sad ending: despite aggressive treatment, the child died from advanced brain cancer. While the grieving family and dedicated care providers will never know whether early intervention would have produced a different outcome, we all wish we'd had the opportunity to try.

Right now there are 9 million uninsured children under the age of 18 in the United States. In Minnesota, there are more than 80,000 uninsured children. Picture the Xcel Energy Center filled to capacity with children. Now fill it again three more times. All those children lack coverage.

In the next week or two, the Senate will take up the SCHIP reauthorization bill. If a reconciled bill can be attained, the legislation will go to President-elect Barack Obama for signing. The bill would be the largest investment in children's health care since the launch of SCHIP in 1997. It would also authorize an initial federal investment in pediatric health care quality improvement that will pay dividends down the road through better health outcomes for children.

We ask the Minnesota delegation to support the SCHIP reauthorization bill. It's a vote for more children to have a chance at a happy ending.

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