

Why Not Support Better Coverage for Uninsured Children?

Congressman Souder voted against the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (HR 976), and he voted to uphold the President's veto. This is in spite of the fact that there is majority support for the bill in both houses of Congress, including many prominent Republicans such as Senator Lugar. HR 976 is a bill that expands the SCHIP program—a program designed to cover uninsured children in families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford private coverage. Despite the success of SCHIP there are still more than 9 million children living without health insurance. Those against the bill give a standard set of reasons, and these reasons can appear very impressive when they are delivered as sound bites for the media. Reality is always more complex so let's "unpack" these bites:

1. The program will cost too much. At a time when President Bush has asked for an additional \$200 billion for the Iraq war, this bill is asking for \$7 billion a year in extra funding for uninsured children. Study after study shows that it is far more expensive if these children show up desperately ill in the ER because they had no insurance. You are going to pay for them either way--it is just that kids are healthier, they do better in school, and it costs us less if they get the care they need before they get really sick.

2. It taxes Hoosiers unfairly. This bill is supported entirely by taxes on tobacco products, and Hoosiers smoke more. The problem of uninsured children, however, does not respect state lines. Besides, a recent study in the journal Public Health showed that increasing taxes on cigarettes reduces smoking prevalence and results in significant savings in medical care costs—the tax pays for itself. The only loser is the tobacco industry, and it is time to stop putting the interests of that industry ahead of the needs of uninsured children.

3. The SCHIP bill is a give-away to illegal aliens. Complaining that any healthcare measure will "help illegal aliens" is an easy way to draw certain groups to your cause. Let's set aside the argument that a country that prides itself on compassionate behavior might want to help all humans in need. Or that a recent RAND study showed that the cost of healthcare for illegal immigrants is less than one tenth of one percent of healthcare spending. It turns out that in the case of HR 676 this particular sound bite is just plain wrong. Sec. 605 of the bill reads: "No federal funding for illegal aliens".

4. The SCHIP bill is a step towards government-controlled health care and it crowds out private insurance. The whole problem is that these families are hit hardest by the increasing cost of health insurance, and even if they can get insurance through their employer they cannot afford the increasing co-pays and deductibles. Private insurers are not meeting the needs of these people; otherwise the problem would not exist in the first place. This is where government is at its best—stepping in to help those in need when market forces and society are failing them.

Thomas Jefferson said that we do not have a government by the majority; we have a government by the majority who participate. Congressman Souder works hard for our district but he cannot represent

people that he never hears from. If you find yourself trying to figure out how you can pay your medical bills please try to let him know about your problems. If you are losing your insurance, or if you are afraid to change jobs because of insurance, try to tell him. If you care about how we take care of our children as a society—please let him know.

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Hoosiers for a Commonsense Health Plan