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Quit playing politics with children's health

Emily Bowen-Marler Published 11:41 a.m. CT Jan. 20, 2018



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There is a program in our country that provides health care access to 9 million children, and it is about to run out of money because Congress is failing to take action on it.

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provides health coverage to eligible children (as well as low-income pregnant women) through both Medicaid and separate CHIP programs. CHIP is administered by states, according to federal requirements. It has been an incredibly successful program that has brought the number of uninsured children down from 14 percent to 5 percent since its inception in 1997. The program is funded jointly by states and the federal government, and it ran out of long-term funding back in September. Congress was well aware of the problem at that time, as a number of states have implored them to take action and reauthorize funding for the program. Despite widespread support for the program in Congress, such action is easier said than done when everyone seems to have a different agenda and political maneuvering continues to leave the CHIP program high and dry.

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As a person of faith, I am deeply troubled by the priorities I see playing out in our federal government. Congress has prioritized gutting and repealing the Affordable Care Act and granting huge corporate tax breaks over extending the long-term funding for CHIP. Nowhere in the Bible do I see taking away access to affordable health care or making sure that big corporations have more money at their disposal lifted up as ways to show one's faith. But I do know that Jesus healed people. That he declared that whoever welcomed the children, welcomed him. That he proclaimed the greatest commandment was to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and the second was like it: to love your neighbor as yourself. How is failing to reauthorize funding for CHIP welcoming of the children in our midst? How is it showing love to our neighbor?

We should not be playing politics with the health of our children. The truth of the matter is, extending funding for CHIP has support on both sides of the aisle. Both Republicans and Democrats want it to happen. The program has had strong support from both parties from the start. This is not a partisan issue. I have called both of my U.S. senators and this is one of the few issues we all agree on. And yet Congress can't seem to make it happen.

And so I implore you, call your U.S. senators and representatives. Call Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. Call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and you can be connected to each of these people in seconds.

Rev. Emily Bowen-Marler is the associate minister of Brentwood Christian Church and a member of SACRED (RedSGF.org).

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