



180-474-198

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LOCAL CONTRIBUTORS

The left's shrill distortions are clouding CHIP debate

Aided and abetted by Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn, the left has been issuing a shrill cry about the fate of the Children's Health Insurance Program.

The essence of the complaint is that as a result of House Bill 2292, signed by Gov. Rick Perry, thousands of children would be left without access to CHIP—forcing children back onto the rolls of the uninsured.

In an open letter to the governor on Aug. 25, the comptroller writes accusatorily: "Since last September, 147,525 children have been dropped off health insurance rolls because of measures you signed into law. This new means testing — which I say is nothing more than a mean test — will certainly further jeopardize innocent children's health."

Of course, the "innocence" of the children is irrelevant, but it lends the distortive element of emotion to the debate. As we all know, doing anything in the name of children gives one license to hold any position no matter how untenable or untrue.

The left has actively opposed the "Personal Responsibility Agreement" provisions in HB 2292. But the law's intent is simple: strongly reinforce the notion of personal responsibility by requiring parents to maintain their child's health, keep them in school, abstain from abusing alcohol or drugs, cooperate with child support enforcement, while actively looking for, and going to, work.

Like the comptroller referring to the governor as "mean," the general debate over the role of government, and the efficacy of government programs, in delivering health and human services has devolved into a deepening hole of irrationality.

Take, for example, the Austin American-Statesman's contribution to the deconstruction of the public debate. The lead editorial on Aug. 25 states, "Texas children need conservatives to show compassion." No facts, just more emotion. The Statesman continued: "Texas leaders weren't promoting fiscal constraint in cutting CHIP, but rather a hard-hearted philosophy that government should push away from helping needy people."

While surely only a coincidence that the editorial was timed perfectly with the comptroller's latest broadside, the Statesman takes measure of the moral and ethical bearing of con-

servatives and castigates us all for changing what has increasingly shown to be an ill-conceived and failing program. A new U.S. Census report demonstrates that despite billions in new dollars spent on Medicaid and CHIP, the number of uninsured in America continues to rise. More government has failed.

The comptroller, the Statesman and the rest of the ideological left are right to debate any and all state policy. There is a defensible liberal position in regards to health and human services, as Texas Sen. Judith Zaffirini has honorably articulated for years

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In an editorial, the American-Statesman defends the Children's Health Insurance Program.

But tossing about insults in lieu of sound argument, while becoming sanctimonious and shrill, has turned a legitimate debate into a childish shoving match.

To better serve all Texans, the comptroller and the Statesman might do well to study facts before spewing vindictive-laced proclamations on the state of another's heart.

The insistence that 147,000 children were thrown off the program because, as the Statesman put it, "there's growing disdain for people who work every day" is simply untrue and mean-spirited itself. More children are covered by CHIP and Medicaid in Texas than ever before; more than 200,000 more children are in those two programs today than there were just two years ago.

As a matter of fact, for some 40 percent of the children not now on CHIP, it was the parent's decision not to re-enroll them. And some 25 percent of children who used to be covered by CHIP are now covered by Medicaid.

But after it is all said and done, CHIP and Medicaid are Band-Aids, making it imperative that state and federal elected leaders instead tackle the real health care issue confronting Texans: the exploding cost of health care.

More than 65 percent of the uninsured in Texas are gainfully employed. The problem is that the cost of health insurance is prohibitive to small businesses and the self-employed. Whatever the solution might be, it is obviously not more government; recent national studies

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show state mandates have driven up the cost of health insurance some 45 percent in recent years.

By eliminating the lion-share of insurance mandates, and letting people purchase only the coverage they need, the cost of insurance and health care in general would drop precipitously — as has been the case when tried.

The newly legalized Health Savings Accounts offer even more hope for the employed-but-uninsured. Some 40 percent of those signing up for these accounts were previously uninsured, according to the U.S. Treasury.

It is imperative for the governor and other state leaders to stand firm; the problem is not a failure of conservative compassion. The problem is a failure of vision on the part of liberals. They continue to define compassion in terms of government appropriations. Decades of experience has unequivocally demonstrated that free markets and free people provide better answers to social problems.

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