

Insurance gaps leaves kids vulnerable

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Shon, who asked that only her nickname be used to protect the identity of her two children, is in pain.

"I'm sitting here now in my living room and my face is swollen. I don't know if I have an abscessed tooth, or what's going on. But it hurts, and it's swollen, and guess what? I don't have any insurance. I can't go to the doctor. If I go to the doctor, guess what I'll be doing? Stackin' on bills, stackin' on bills, stackin' on bills."

A full-time student studying healthcare administration in Jackson, Miss., Shon says she would be adding her own medical bills to that of her 2- and 16-year-olds' for whom she has applied four times for Medicaid over the past 22 months, but for various reasons — including administrative snafus — have been unsuccessful at receiving aid.

The 32-year-old mother, whose teenage daughter has suffered a broken leg from an accident at school, skin problems and unexplained baldness in one spot on her head, has been receiving guidance from the Children's Defense Fund in Jackson after accumulating more than \$10,000 in medical bills. Shon says her teen also needs new glasses, but can't afford them and hasn't seen a dentist in 10 years. CDF reports that Shon is the mother of only two of the 9 million children who are uninsured in the U.S. Also, they are among 13 million American children living in poverty. More than 28,000 others per year die before their first birthdays.

Yet, according to the Children Defense

Fund Action Council, 245 of the 435-member U.S. House of Representatives and 51 of the 100-member Senate voted for less than half of the top 10 bills that could have improved the lives of the nation's children last year. That includes 30 lawmakers who voted for none of the bills.

"The Children's Defense Fund is very concerned that elected officials aren't taking children seriously because children can't vote," said Nayyera Haq, a spokeswoman for the CDF. "We need to have leaders in Congress who are willing to make a real commitment to putting our children first."

The 10 bills that the CDFAC used to score the lawmakers included increasing funding to education and health care, helping low-income families to afford heating costs, increasing minimum wages, and increasing funding to Head Start, largely went unheeded in the 109th Congress.

"Last year, Congress failed to make any significant progress in the lives of America's children," CDF President Marian Wright Edelman said in a statement. "Children are our nation's most cost-effective investment, yet the 109th Congress continued to cut funding for vital programs and failed to make crucial child investments while lavishing tax cuts on the wealthiest Americans. This new Congress has a real opportunity to make our children a priority and to genuinely improve the lives of millions of America's children."

Evidence is clear that the CDF concerns may fair better in the 110th Congress. Though the CDFAC Scorecard is non-partisan, an NNPA survey of the scores shows that in the

109th, dominated by Republicans, all 30 lawmakers who voted 0 percent on the 10 bills favored by the CDFAC were Republicans.

Of the 124 who voted 100 percent with the CDFAC, all were Democrats, except one Republican and two Independents. They were Republican Sen. Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island and Independent Reps. Bernie Sanders and James Jeffords of Vermont.

Other elements of the 2006 CDFAC Congressional Scorecard:

- Twenty-six Senators and 98 Members of Congress scored 100 percent.

- Twenty-three Senators and 7 Members of Congress scored 0 percent.

- North Dakota and Vermont's Congressional delegations were rated the best advocates for children, both with 100 percent.

- New Hampshire (15 percent) Alaska (13 percent) and Wyoming (7 percent) were rated the three worst delegations for children.

- Scores of current Senate leaders were: Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), 100 percent; Majority Whip Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), 100 percent; Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), 0 percent; and Senate Minority Whip Trent Lott (R-Miss.), 10 percent.

- Scores of current House leaders were: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), 100 percent; Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), 100 percent; Majority Whip, James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.), 100 percent; Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio), 20 percent; and Minority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), 20 percent.

- Of the 37 Congressional Black Caucus

members who were scored, all received between 90 percent and 100 percent; except six. They were Reps. William Lacy Clay (Mo.), John Conyers Jr. (Mich.), Maxine Waters (Calif.), and Albert Russell Wynn (Md.), all of whom received 80 percent. Rep. Donald Payne (N.J.) received 70 percent and the lowest score of CBC members was Rep. William J. Jefferson (La.) with 60 percent. Five current CBC members were not scored because three are freshmen and two do not have a vote. D. C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and Virgin Island Delegate Donna Christian-Christensen.

Edelman says members of Congress are informed of their score by the CDFAC and told that they will be expected to improve during the 110th Congress.

"This new Congress has the opportunity to give all 9 million uninsured children health coverage in 2007 and lift millions more out of poverty," said Edelman. "How we take care of our children speaks to our values and priorities as a society. Voters should tell Congress we can and must guarantee all children health coverage."

Shon, who is scheduled to graduate in December 2008, says telling them is not nearly enough.

"I think that they need to be in an economic situation equivalent to that of someone like me. Someone needs to make it mandatory that they spend one week in my situation or people who even have it worse than me," Shon said.

"You wouldn't let your kids live like that. Why would you let mine live like that?"

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October 27, 1891
Philip B. Downing
Inventor of the Improved Mail Box



April 26, 1892
Sarah Boone
Inventor of the Improved Ironing Board



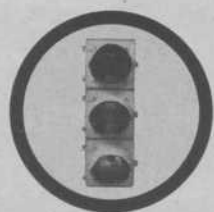
June 11, 1893
Thomas W. Stewart
Inventor of the Self-Wringing Mop



November 23, 1897
John L. Love
Inventor of the Portable Pencil Sharpener



November 15, 1898
Lyda D. Newman
Inventor of the Improved Hair Brush



November 20, 1923
Garrett A. Morgan
Inventor of the Automatic Traffic Signal



February 9, 1960
I.O. Carter
Inventor of the Nursery Chair



July 6, 1971
Henry T. Sampson
Inventor of the Early Gamma-Electric Cell

