

By U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, guest columnist

Thursday, January 29, 2009

I am writing in response to your Jan. 27 editorial, "What if teenagers wrote a letter to Rep. Tom Rooney?", regarding my vote against the expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

The key word here is "expansion."

I would like to restate that I strongly support SCHIP, and in fact I voted for a substitute bill that would cover more needy children in a fiscally responsible way. As many know, SCHIP was originally a Republican idea to provide health insurance to low-income children. The recently passed legislation exceeds the original scope and principles of SCHIP by leaps and bounds.

I appreciate your editorial's recognition of my work in children's welfare. The children I worked to protect would have been covered by level funding under a clean extension of SCHIP. I am also the father of three small sons. They are the very reason I voted against this bill. I campaigned on making this country a better place for them and because the single biggest concern I heard on the campaign trail was that of our nation's out-of-control spending. I just did not think we could be more fiscally irresponsible and mortgage our children's future.

As I said during my campaign, I believe there are better ways to make health care more affordable. More individualized control with tax breaks and medical malpractice reform would do a lot more to actually fix the problem rather than simply spending more money that we don't have.

The SCHIP bill, which passed the House, will vastly expand government-run health care and result in families dropping their private insurance coverage to enroll in a government program. The legislation will also increase spending by \$72 billion.

Also, I could not support a plan that could allow illegal aliens to fraudulently enroll in Medicaid

and SCHIP. The Democrats' plan also would allow adults to enroll in SCHIP, taking away resources from uninsured low-income children.

States are struggling, and this plan would put additional stress on those states having a hard time paying Medicaid benefits. We must make sure that all the children currently eligible are receiving benefits.

In a year when our economy is teetering on the brink of disaster, expanding this program in the way Congress approved is going to seriously inhibit our chances to get the nation's finances in order. I could not in good faith endorse such a costly expansion in these tough economic times.

These are hard times and call for tough decisions. My vote on SCHIP was not easy and not simply a reflection of what Republican leadership espoused. It was a decision based on what I believe would help give my children and the children I represent a better standing in the future. Time will tell if this is a good piece of legislation. In the meantime, I will continue to look for ways to work across party lines. I am looking forward to working with my Democratic colleagues to tackle issues such as assisting veterans, streamlining services for troops suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and working toward a bipartisan plan to help lower property insurance.

Unlike the past cultures in Congress, I have forged many new friendships with those across the aisle. While we disagree on expanding SCHIP, I believe we all are trying to do what's best for the country. I pledge to all of my constituents that this will always be my standard.