



## **Lump of coal for six million American kids?**

**By Marc Homer, Kids Count Coordinator, Wyoming Children's Action Alliance**

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) expired in September 2007 when the U.S. House of Representatives came up a few votes short in an attempt to override the President's veto, despite a veto proof majority in the Senate. Republican and Democrat leaders worked together to come up with a solid compromise bill that is still hanging in the balance. A continuing resolution keeps the program afloat while the political machinery grinds away at hope for the 6 million American children whose health and security depend on the program.

With demonstrated success nationwide, SCHIP is the wrong bill for ideological gamesmanship. Polls show that the vast majority of Americans support investing in children's health. With a ten year track record of success, SCHIP is the only way many children can have coverage even though most of them have working parents. Six out of every seven children on Medicaid or SCHIP have one or more working parent who simply cannot afford private health insurance.

Wyoming's Congressional delegation's obstruction of SCHIP reauthorization underscores the irony that they are themselves, as high ranking Federal employees, the beneficiaries of the greatest health insurance package in America—one that unlike SCHIP, is in fact the kind of socialized medicine that they have publicly excoriated.

Today, we are spending \$9 billion a month on the war in Iraq, but President Bush has declared that we cannot afford an additional \$35 billion over five years for children's healthcare. That calculation just doesn't add up. The truth is that we cannot afford the long-term costs of denying millions of children essential health care. By funding SCHIP the only legacy we're passing on to the next generation is healthier children with a better chance at success.

We must ensure that this vital program for children's healthcare continues to make a difference in the lives of children. As the number of uninsured adults has risen and health insurance premiums have gone up 79 percent while incomes have only risen 19 percent over five years, it is not surprising that more parents are forced to rely on SCHIP to provide health coverage for their children. It would be a waste of resources not to give SCHIP the expansion it needs.

In these closing days of this congressional session, it is possible for political gridlock to be broken and compromise found when our politicians—our leaders—prioritize the needs of children. Wyoming politicians should stop the political posturing and focus on taking care of Wyoming Kids.

Wyoming's Barbara Cubin, who is among the handful of house members responsible for holding up the bipartisan effort to reauthorize SCHIP may have the opportunity to do the right thing for American children before the holidays. The congresswoman need only to allow herself to hear the voices of the vast majority of Americans, feel the moral obligation weighing upon her, and recognize that keeping America's kids healthy is directly linked to long term prosperity and national security. Folks, there are better things to do with Wyoming's coal than putting a lump of it in six million American kids' stockings.