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**AS I SEE IT**

**Missouri General Assembly not coming through for children's health**

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Special to The Star

Partnership for Children always asks Jefferson City lawmakers to consider one question before voting on legislation: "Is it good for the children?" During recent votes on expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program, it was obvious that question was ignored.

To the dismay of child advocates, the Missouri House voted to strip financing from this year's budget for several important children's services, including Gov. Jay Nixon's plan to bring 27,000 more children into the insurance program.

This program allows eligible children to get health coverage at little or no cost so they can see a doctor when sick, get preventive treatment such as immunizations and well-child visits, and have health problems detected early before they become more serious and costly.

The House decision to turn down the governor's request for the current fiscal year is an omen for next year's budget as well. The full House is expected to debate the 2010 budget soon.

The House Budget Committee has already shown that its priorities are not with our children by voting to delete the children's insurance expansion from the 2010 state budget.

If Missouri refuses to invest in our children's health, we will turn down \$60 million in federal matching funds.

This is money that Missourians already have paid to Washington. So instead of Missouri taxpayers' money coming back to Missouri to support our children, it would be redirected to other states.

Lack of health insurance is not just a problem for the poor or unemployed. More than 85 percent of uninsured children live in families in which at least one parent works. These children often end up in emergency rooms for treatment, where the higher costs are passed on to hospitals and to all of us.

The solution is to get and use the federal money to provide coverage so more children can get medical care before their conditions become chronic and require emergency room visits and other more costly remedies.

In the recent votes on this issue, lawmakers have sent a very disappointing message that health care for our children is not a priority.

Please call or write your state legislators to let them know you want to see your federal tax dollars supporting Missouri's children, not balancing the budgets of other states.

For more information on this and other important children's issues, or to receive weekly updates on legislation affecting children, visit Partnership for Children's Web site at <http://www.pfc.org/>.

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