

Rally held to urge Herger to vote to override Bush child health veto

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer
Chico Enterprise-Record

Article Launched:10/17/2007 12:00:00 AM PDT

People who want Rep. Wally Herger to buck the president on children's health coverage held rallies at the congressman's offices in Chico and Redding Tuesday.

Bush's veto of a bill to expand a health-coverage program for low-income children "disproportionately affects working families," said Guy Rinfrow, a regional political organizer for the Service Employees International Union.

He was overseeing a rally and candlelight vigil across the street from Herger's Chico office Tuesday afternoon. Only a handful of people had turned out by 4 p.m., but Rinfrow said more were expected during the two hours the group planned to be there.

Darin Thacker, press secretary to the congressman, said Herger, who is in Washington this week, believes children's health is very important but that he still supports the president's position.

At issue is the Healthy Families program — known around the country as the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). It provides health coverage for youngsters whose families are poor but not poor enough to qualify for Medi-Cal.

The program was due to expire Sept. 30, but under a continuing resolution, its funding has been extended through Nov. 15.

Last month, Congress passed a measure that would have expanded the program, but Bush vetoed it.

On Thursday, Democrats in the House hope to muster enough votes to override the veto, Thacker said. They'll need a two-thirds majority, which would require at least 14 Republicans to switch their votes.

Various groups are rallying around the state and the country, drawing attention to Thursday's vote.

Representatives of an organization called the North Valley Sponsoring Committee planned to deliver petitions in favor of a veto override at Herger's Redding office on Tuesday, according to Rocio Valdez, a spokeswoman for the group.

Alberto Velazquez, executive director of the Sacramento-based organization, stated in an e-mail that the petitions had about 1,000 signatures.

"We want to make sure that children have health insurance," said Valdez, who is from the Marysville area. She said Healthy Families is very important to low-income people.

The North Valley Sponsoring Committee is affiliated with PICO National Network, a coalition of faith-based community organizations.

The \$35 billion bill Congress passed last month would have extended SCHIP for five years and expanded it, adding 3.4 million children to the 6.6 million already covered.

Thacker said Herger opposed the measure because he felt it was a step toward government control of health care. Also, the congressman felt that under the plan to include children whose families could be earning as much as \$60,000 a year, some people would take their kids off private insurance to enroll them in the government program. Herger thinks that's inappropriate.

If the effort to override the president's veto fails, there will be an attempt to reach a compromise between what Democrats and Republicans want, Thacker said.

He faulted the Democrats for delaying the vote on the override, saying it wasted precious time that would be needed to try to work out a compromise.

Staff writer Larry Mitchell can be reached at 896-7759 or lmitchell@chicoer.com.

Close Window

Send To Printer