

MATSUI SUPPORTS EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTH INSURANCE Children, Working Families Should Have Health

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Washington, DC — Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) questioned why health insurance is not on Congress's legislative calendar this week, especially considering May 1 — 8 is Cover the Uninsured Week. With health care coverage one of her top priorities and in support of Cover the Uninsured Week, Matsui has co-sponsored three bills which would begin to address the number of uninsured by providing access to affordable and quality health insurance.

"If this is Cover the Uninsured Week, it is perplexing that Congress has yet to address a problem that affects 45 million working Americans and is only continuing to grow," said Matsui. "California has the 6th largest proportion of uninsured in the nation. And in California alone, the number of uninsured Californians has increased by 200,000 people between 2000 and 2003. Our state now has over six and a half million uninsured. And disturbing, 21% of California's uninsured are children below the age of 18."

The three bills Matsui is cosponsoring each target an important group. Specifically targeted are the three fastest growing segments of the uninsured: low-income working parents, the nearly-elderly (people between 55 and 64), and small business employees. Together, these bills could provide health insurance to over 23 million uninsured Americans.

Continued Matsui, "Congress should not sit idly by, waiting for this problem to get worse. We should, on a bi-partisan basis, expand access to health insurance, which is why I am supporting legislation that builds on proven programs."

The FamilyCare Act would lower costs and expand affordable coverage for working parents, by making the parents of children eligible for the State Children's Health Insurance Program and Medicaid also eligible for coverage. Additionally, this bill would give States new tools to identify and enroll eligible families; expanding outreach efforts. Almost 70% of California's uninsured children are in families where the head of household works full-time.

The Medicare Early Access Act would allow people between the ages 55 and 64 to purchase Medicare. Currently, there are 3.5 million uninsured people age 55 and over who are not yet eligible for Medicare. And the Small Business Health Insurance Promotion Act would create a 50 percent tax credit to help small businesses and the self-employed with the costs of health coverage. Currently, over half of America's uninsured workers are self-employed or work for a small business with fewer than 50 employees.

"There's been a lot of talk about values in Washington lately, yet nine million children in this country lack health insurance. I can find no better definition of family values than insuring our children have health coverage. Congress should move forward with this legislation. Health insurance should be our highest priority."

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