Kid's Health

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

file kid's health

Talking It Over

By Hillary Rodham Clinton

Children's health care shouldn't be headache

When our daughter, Chelsea, was 9, she had to have her tonsils taken out. Though we knew it was a low-risk medical procedure, Bill and I were nervous wrecks. But our family was lucky because we had health insurance. Paying for Chelsea's hospital stay was the least of our worries.

Given the stress we felt when our child was hospitalized overnight for a relatively minor procedure, I can barely imagine the heartache experienced by parents who can't afford health insurance for their children each time a child becomes ill. In too many cases, they are overwhelmed by questions not only of how and when their sick child will respond to treatment, but whether they will be able to afford the necessary medical care in the first place.

The time is long overdue for all of us to address what I believe is an economic, social and moral crisis in our country. The United States is the only industrialized nation that does not extend health coverage to all of its children. There is no good reason our country, which is blessed with the most advanced and innovative medical facilities and talent in the world, continues to allow so many children to grow up without regular access to basic health care.

Today, nearly 10 million Americans under age 18 have no health insurance. A recent study showed that 20 million children were without insurance for at least one month over a two-year period. As health care costs and insurance premiums keep rising, fewer employers are offering health insurance to their workers. And more and more working parents are finding that, after paying the rent, heat, electricity and grocery bills, they cannot afford coverage for their children.

What is most surprising is that the majority of our uninsured children are not poor. At least two-thirds of all uninsured children are being raised by working parents whose incomes are above the official poverty level. In fact, the number of poor, uninsured children has been decreasing (thanks to Medicaid), while the number of uninsured middle-class children has been increasing.

What this means is that too many children who have trouble seeing a blackboard do not get the glasses they need to correct their vision. Too many nagging coughs go untreated until they worsen into life-threatening conditions that require costly treatments and lengthy hospital stays. And many parents, faced with the threat of an uninsured injury, forbid their children to play sports or visit the playground.

Some people believe we cannot guarantee health care to all children because of cost. But, as other countries have already found, a sensible child health insurance system is a critical, cost-effective investment in the future. That's because most children who become seriously ill or injured are eventually treated somewhere and at a much greater cost than their parents — or we — would have paid if their symptoms had been treated earlier.

In negotiations over the new balanced budget, the president has made sure that as many as 5 million children currently living without health insurance can get the coverage and care they deserve. And this spring several bills are making their way through Congress that build on innovative efforts begun in individual states to cover all uninsured children and make it easier for working parents to buy health insurance for their children.

In recent years, many states have been able to insure thousands of children by expanding Medicaid benefits to include older children and children living in families whose incomes are slightly above the poverty level. Others have created state-funded child insurance programs or joined forces with private insurance companies to subsidize premiums for needy families.

These efforts represent a good start. But the question of whether a sick American child gets needed medical treatment should not depend on where he or she lives. We must encourage members of Congress to create a plan that ensures every single child in our country enjoys the same health care and security Bill and I are able to give our daughter.

Providing health care to all of our children is more than just a political challenge. It is a test of our faith in the future and of whether our rhetoric about family values will be translated into action on behalf of our children.

The Washington Times
THURSDAY, MAY 22, 1997

White House seeks banking deregulation

By Anne Marriott
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Clinton administration yesterday called for sweeping financial-services reform that would allow banks, brokerage houses and insurance companies to jump into each others' business.

Consumers could obtain a mortgage from Merrill Lynch or buy life insurance from Citibank by 2000 under a plan unveiled yesterday by Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin.

"As you know better than anyone," Mr. Rubin told a group of financiers here, "the old lines that separated the insurance, securities and banking industries have increasingly blurred as new financial products and services have appeared."

Among other things, the administration's plan would:

- Allow banks to sell insurance and securities.
- Allow brokerage houses to offer more banklike services.
- Allow banks to own some nonfinancial companies.

Financial modernization would mean lower costs and more choice for consumers as banks, brokerage houses and insurance companies merge to become more competitive in a shrinking global marketplace, Mr. Rubin said.

The administration's proposal comes nearly 10 years after Congress first attempted, and failed, to reform complicated banking laws.

Still, House banking committee Chairman Jim Leach said yesterday he's hopeful this will be the year financial-services reform finally makes its way through Congress.

The Iowa Republican added, however, that "modernization cannot and should not move in Congress unless it primarily will serve the public." Mr. Leach said he plans to complete committee hearings on the subject by mid-June.

Restrictions on the financial-services industry have already loosened somewhat. Banks can sell insurance in towns with populations of less than 5,000, thanks to a recent ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court. And the Office of the Comptroller of Currency said in November that banks could derive up to 25 percent of their revenues from securities and underwriting.

But those steps don't go far enough to satisfy the demands of the highly competitive and technically oriented financial-services industry, the Clinton administration argues.

Mr. Rubin yesterday called federal regulations of the industry "outdated" and urged Congress to consider the "enormous change we've seen" since the Glass-Steagall Act was passed in 1934. That legislation, among other things, strictly defines the roles of banks, brokerages and insurance companies.

The secretary will testify before the House banking committee on June 3.

The administration's proposal contains some consumer-protection measures. It would require banks to tell consumers that stocks or bonds purchased at the bank are not federally insured. It would also allow customers to decide whether a bank can share confidential consumer information with its non-bank affiliates.

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Critics argue that the administration's proposal doesn't adequately protect consumers. Financial institutions should be required to do more than tell customers a product is not federally insured or that it might drop in value, they said.

"If you're going to expand this whole marketplace to allow the merging of investment firms with banking and insurance firms, then you have to modernize consumer-protection laws as well," said Mary Griffin of the Consumers Union.

Allen Fishbein, general counsel for the Washington-based Center for Community Change, said the administration's claim that reform would mean at least $3 billion in annual savings for consumers because of greater efficiencies is unfounded. Banks that have consolidated recently have actually raised fees, he said.

But supporters of the proposal said yesterday it will create a financial-services supermarket for consumers — one-stop shopping for everything from a savings account to life insurance to stocks.

"It's a misunderstanding of the industry to think that banks are going to be anything other than financial-services companies for the foreseeable future," said Geoffrey P. Miller, director of the banking center at New York University Law School. "They're simply not going to be conglomerate industrial firms."

Narrowing trade gap sets another record

By Martin Crutsinger
ASSOCIATED PRESS

The trade deficit narrowed dramatically in March to $8.5 billion as rising demand for American jetliners, telecommunications equipment and computers pushed U.S. exports to a second consecutive monthly record.

The Commerce Department said yesterday that the March trade gap between imports and exports was down 19.3 percent from February's $10.5 billion deficit. Exports shot up 4.1 percent, offsetting a record 1.2 percent rise in imports.

The Clinton administration hailed the better-than-expected showing as evidence of America's global competitive clout, but private economists called the improvement only a temporary reprieve, given a number of factors acting to keep the deficit high.

Major overseas markets in Europe and Japan remain mired in slow growth while the U.S. economy is racing ahead, pushing up demand for foreign products. U.S. consumers have also benefited from a strong rise in the value of the dollar over the past two years, which makes foreign products cheaper in this country.

Even with the March improvement, the deficit so far this year is running at an annual rate of $126 billion, compared with last year's $114 billion, making it the worst showing in eight years.

"We are not out of the woods yet. Today's number is just a temporary reprieve. We have got bigger deficits ahead of us before we see any permanent improvement," said Lawrence Chimerine, chief economist at the Economic Strategy Institute, a Washington think tank.

Of particular worry to economists is a rising deficit with Japan, which they see as a product of the dollar's strength against the yen over the past two years. They said recent declines in the dollar are encouraging but will not help lower the deficit until next year.

For March, the deficit with Japan was up 8.3 percent to $4.6 billion, the highest since October. The deficit will rise even further in April, based on figures already reported by the Japanese government.

America's imbalance with China did decline by 22.4 percent to $2.6 billion, the smallest gap in nearly a year. Sales of commercial jetliners rose, while imports of Chinese toys, shoes and clothing all declined.

While hailing the competitiveness of U.S. exports, Commerce Undersecretary Everett Ehrlich told reporters that the administration was still concerned that "China remains the only market in the world where U.S. exports are not growing in the long term."

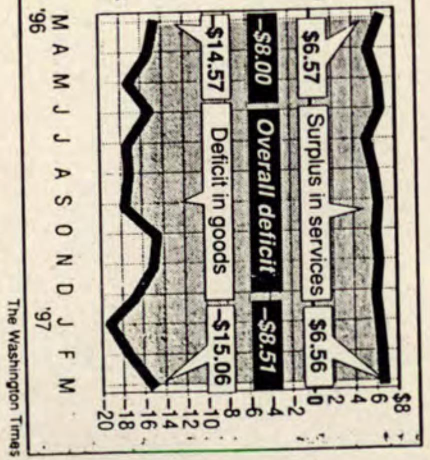
Stocks at first rallied on the better-than-expected trade report but quickly gave up those gains. In late afternoon trading, the Dow Jones industrial average was down more than 50 points.

Mr. Ehrlich said with the deficit narrowing in March, it was likely that the overall economy grew in the first quarter around 6 percent, even faster than the 5.6 percent rate of increase first reported.

A worsening trade deficit has been one of the weak spots in a U.S. economy that is presently performing remarkably well, with inflation remaining under control despite the lowest unemployment level in 23 years.

TRADE GAP SHRINKS

The U.S. trade deficit declined to $8.51 billion in March as exports set a record for the second month in a row.



Merchandise trade deficit for goods and surplus for services, in billions of dollars, seasonally adjusted

Source: Commerce Department

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