

TRI-PARISHTIMES.COM

Weekly in print & daily on the net

Last modified: Tuesday, April 3, 2007 11:17 AM PDT

BISCO takes up health care cause for children

By HOWARD J. CASTAY JR.

BISCO came the forefront in 2006, promoting an emergency family plan to organize family histories in the event of a mass evacuation during a hurricane.

The group is on the move again, although its goal has shifted to monitoring the health care needs of children that live in low to middle income households.

The Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing Network, or BISCO for short, is a group comprised of more than 50 Lafourche churches, organizations and officials.

Fresh from an appearance on Capitol Hill last month, BISCO Director Sharon Gauthe, her husband David and a host of others joined a delegation of 40 clergy and families from Louisiana that lobbied Washington, D.C., lawmakers, asking that they renew their commitment to health care for children by funding various state Children's Health Insurance Programs in a \$50 billion package.

Last week, the House and Senate agreed to include monies for health care and a host of other programs. However, the funding will not go into effect until tax cuts provided in President George Bush's first term expire.

In short, the budget package for the upcoming fiscal year is still under discussion, the BISCO director said.

"What most of us don't know is that if Congress does not include this funding in the nation's upcoming fiscal year budget, we will no longer have LaCHIP in Louisiana," Gauthe said.

LaCHIP n "Louisiana Children's Health Insurance Program n provides health and dental insurance to youngsters under age 19. The program also covers hospital treatment, prescription drugs and preventive shots.

"As America spends \$8 to \$10 billion monthly on the war in Iraq, President Bush included less than half of the funding needed to keep current children enrolled in the state Children's Health Insurance Program," Gauthe explained. "How can you explain to 9 million children across this country that we have don't have money for their health care in the United States of America, but

we have plenty of money for guns and bombs in Iraq?"

Bush's budget also proposes cuts in many domestic programs that aid local families, Gauthe continued, including an 18 percent cut in heating assistance to low-income families. "But the cuts to children's health are particularly notable, so that's why we joined in the cause," she said.

Gauthe said she is proud of the group's March effort to call Congress's attention to the health care issue.

“It’s all part of our mission, to build a powerful, interfaith, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-issue organization that serves as a voice for all persons in South Louisiana,” Gauthe said.

In 2006, BISCO devised a family emergency plan called ICE NUMBERS, an acronym for In Case of Emergency Numbers, which include family, insurance and medical information.

For More Info:

To find out if your child qualifies for LaCHIP, call 1-877-2LaCHIP (1-877-252-2447), or visit www.dhh.state.la.us/offices to download a copy of the application.



Staff photo by HOWARD J. CASTAY JR. • Tri-Parish Times * Sharon Gauthe, director of BISCO, the Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing Network, discusses the group’s recent trip to Washington, D.C., to lobby for continued funding of the state’s health insurance program for children, LaCHIP. She made an appearance recently on the Jerome Boykin Show, on