

Action Alert • January 2007

Great Expectations

by SUSIE JOHNSON*

Witnessing the changing of leadership in Washington, D.C.; listening to speeches during the observation of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birth; and considering the prospects of an African American, an Hispanic American and a woman as presidential nominees provides moments full of expectation. The composition of the 110th Congress is a symbol of progress in our society, with a woman speaker of the house, more women members than at any other time, and more Blacks in positions of power.

These instances of possibility bring to mind Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Within the context of Victorian England, Dickens offered lessons about arrogance, class differences and yearning to establish connection with others.

Jan. 14, 2007, as I sat in a pew at Riverside Church in New York City for a commemoration service for Dr. King, I heard three speakers mark our time as both degenerate and hopeful. Former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards painted a picture of a divided country that echoed the social issues confronting England at the turn of the century: a United States of wealth and a United States of blistering poverty.

Martin Luther King III challenged listeners to live up to his father's legacy. Mr. King shared his expectation for opportunity and sustainability for all children and all families in the United States. His expectation is our expectation.

The final speaker was Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund and a long-time friend of United Methodist Women. She called upon those present at Riverside Church to act on behalf of the more than 9 million U.S. children without health insurance. She has an expectation that our nation should care for the health of its children, and our actions could make that a reality.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Human progress is not inevitable." You must act -- act for the children of the United States, and for their expectation of a bright future.

Charles Dickens wrote two endings for *Great Expectations*: a happy ending and an uncertain ending. He chose uncertainty. Today we are unsure whether Congress will fulfill its expectations. We are uncertain if the expectations of speakers at the commemoration service will be realized. We know for sure that our actions can determine if this will be a year when hopes are fulfilled.



ACTION

Call your U.S. representative to say you support national health-insurance coverage for all children as outlined in the Children's Defense Fund proposal that streamlines programs to expand coverage and access to health care. To contact your Congressional representatives, call the Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121.

For information about the Children's Defense Fund proposal, visit the organization's website: www.childrensdefense.org or call: 800- 233-1200.

Come to Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C. March 9-12, 2007. The theme this year is "And How are the Children?" For information, visit: www.advocacydays.org.

Read statements from *The United Methodist Book of Resolutions 2004*: No. 108, "Correcting Injustices in Health Care," and No. 113, "Universal Access to Health Care."

The Healthy Child Act of 2007 (Children's Defense Fund Proposal)

What would the Children's Defense Fund Proposal Do? It would ensure affordable access to comprehensive health and mental-health care for all children in the United States. It would simplify and consolidate children's health-care coverage under Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) into a single program that guarantees children in all 50 states and the District of Columbia will receive medically necessary services.

Who would be eligible?

- Children in families with incomes at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level -- \$60,000 for a family of four in 2006 -- would be eligible. Children with family incomes more than 300% could buy into the program.
- Pregnant women at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level would be eligible for prenatal, delivery and post-partum care for at least 60 days after birth to ensure babies are born healthy and new mothers get the health and mental care they need to care for their children.
- Youth who have transitioned from the foster-care system through age 20 and other special-needs children covered by current law would be eligible.

What benefits would be included?

- Children enrolled in this new program would receive comprehensive coverage of medically necessary care equivalent to current Medicaid benefits.

What would be the cost for families?

- Children in families with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level -- \$40,000 for a family of four in 2006 -- would pay nothing for coverage or services.

How would the Children's Defense Fund proposal streamline enrollment?

- Children currently enrolled in Medicaid or SCHIP would be enrolled automatically.
- Children currently receiving services under certain federal assistance programs like school lunch and Food Stamps would be enrolled automatically with opportunity for families to "opt out."
- Parents would also have the option to enroll children at birth, school registration or issuance of a Social Security number.
- Applications would be short and simple to complete, children would be presumed immediately eligible for services, and obstacles to enroll and stay enrolled would be eliminated.

Other key provisions

- There would be no additional cost to states for child-coverage expansion or enhanced benefits. Funds for coverage expansion and improvements would come from the federal government.
- Eligible children would be guaranteed coverage under this program regardless of their state of residence.
- To improve children's access to health and mental-health services, payment to health-care providers would be increased to the same level as Medicare.

Source: Children's Defense Fund webpage
(http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=healthy_child_facts)