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Nearly Two in Five Children Lack Health Insurance

WV Citizen Action questions Bush Administration's Priorities in Face of Healthcare Crisis

Charleston, WV —One in three Americans under the age of 65, and a staggering 36.7 percent of all children in America, lacked health insurance for at least a portion of 2002-2003, according to a new report released by WV Citizen Action Group today. In West Virginia, nearly one in three (31.7% under the age of 65) lacked health insurance during 2002-2003.

These findings come at a time when Congress will be asked to vote on a budget rules bill that could lead to \$400 billion in cuts to the State Children's Health Insurance Program and Medicaid.

"What we have on our hands is a national crisis," said Norm Steenstra, Citizen Action Executive Director. "More than 35 percent of our children don't have health insurance, yet our President is talking about giving more tax breaks to wealthy Americans and major corporations. It's time to really examine our priorities."

The report also found that people of color—specifically Latinos and African Americans—were more likely to be uninsured. Nearly 60 percent of Latinos and 43 percent of African Americans did not have health insurance for a portion of 2002 and 2003, compared to 23 percent of whites.

"This Administration has demonstrated time and time again that it values war and wealth over the health of America's working families," said Steenstra. "The results of this report are astonishing, but it should come as no surprise that covering the uninsured does not top the President's agenda."

In West Virginia, two out of three (66.1%) of the uninsured were in working families and of those significant portions came from middle class families. For example, among people with incomes over 200% percent the federal poverty level (\$37,320 annually for a family of four) more than one out of four was uninsured over the past two years.

One of the reasons people lacked insurance during 2002-2003 is because they suffered a temporary job loss. The Economic Policy Institute reports that we are in the "longest sustained labor slump since the great depression." (*JobWatch*, March 2004) Compounding the problem is that many of the newly created jobs do not offer health insurance as a benefit. Since George W. Bush took office, the number of uninsured Americans has risen by at least 14 percent—the largest increase in a decade.

The Families USA report entitled *One in Three, Non Elderly Americans without Health Insurance*, expands upon census data, which reports annually the number of Americans who are uninsured for the entire previous calendar year. Census data revealed that 43.6 million Americans lacked health insurance during all of 2002, but *One in Three* took a closer look and found that nearly twice as many—mostly working and middle class families—were uninsured for at least a portion of 2002-2003. See www.familiesusa.org

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