

Colorado Health Care Poll Press Conference Talking Points

Dr. Joan Bothner

Children's Hospital
Opening Remarks / Welcome

Dr. Martha Middlemist

Colorado AAP

Good Morning. I am, Dr. Martha Middlemist, President of the Colorado Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a pediatrician in private practice at Pediatrics Denver Tech-Center.

The Colorado Chapter of the AAP joined the Colorado Medical Society in commissioning this poll in an attempt to understand where Colorado's voting public placed children's health care as a priority for state policy makers. The results surprised even us in that there was clear and resounding response, across a broad range of socio-economic populations, to Put Colorado Children First.

Our poll confirms what every doctor who treats children would hope every parent should fervently believe: That all children should have health insurance, so they get the right care at the right place at the right time. Colorado voters have made it very clear through this poll that they are ready for Colorado to Put Children First.

Voters stated their desire to Put Colorado Children First with the following points:

- *Voters identified improving the health, education, and safety of children as the most important issue for the state and federal government to address. This was ranked above the economy & jobs, immigration, homeland security, care for seniors, taxes and transportation issues.*
- *Overall, 90% of voters say that children's issues will be important to them when they vote, including a sizeable majority, 60%, who say that children's issues will be very important in their voting decisions.*
- *If their parents are unable to afford other coverage, 73% of voters believe that every child in Colorado should be covered by a government-supported health care.*

These poll results prioritizing children's wellbeing are in stark contrast to the current status of children's health care in Colorado. A very recent study by my colleagues at The Children's Hospital paint a bleak picture: Even kids enrolled in Colorado Medicaid can't find a pediatrician, and both they and children without any coverage are at a significantly

higher risk of getting sick, staying sick. For more detailed information on these findings, a summary of this study is provided in your media packet.

It has been well publicized that Colorado has ranked poorly in recent years in terms of immunizing our young children. The link between insurance coverage and children getting the necessary health care services they need, such as immunizations, is evident in the astonishing number of Colorado infants and toddlers hospitalized for diseases that a vaccine would have prevented. In far too many instances, in numbers far beyond those of their insured cohorts, children will not make it out of the hospital. This isn't just tragic. It is also preventable. We have the resources to make this right. And now, perhaps, the political will.

As a pediatrician, I am heartened by this extraordinary measure of public support for what we as doctors consider just plain common sense. We and our colleagues across the medical profession are united in our resolve to turn this public support into the political will to take action for children in the next session of the Colorado Legislature.

Dr. Lynn Parry

Colorado Medical Society

Draft Remarks

Good morning. I am Lynn Parry, and I am here today in my capacity as president of the Colorado Medical Society. I am a practicing neurologist in _____.

The story behind these compelling responses from Colorado voters is that we have reached a political tipping point that state policy makers and candidates for state office should recognize and embrace. As the poll finds:

- ***Few voters believe that the conditions for children in Colorado have improved over the past five years. Only 16% of voters say conditions have improved for children and a greater number, 25%, say they have gotten worse.***

The voters, if not necessarily all our elected officials, have connected the dots between access to health care and the general physical and fiscal health of our state, and by overwhelming margins. My colleagues across our state emphatically agree with their patients

The patients we see without insurance are employed, working Coloradoans. A majority of the nine million uninsured children in the U.S. live in households where at least one parent works full-time, year-round. Uninsured children are less likely to have a primary source of health care and often have fewer doctor visits compared with insured children. They have more unmet medical and dental needs than insured children.¹

The uninsured among our fellow Coloradoans are escalating, especially among our children, and it is hidden tax we all pay. A growing body of research has come to similar

¹ See Families USA report, September 2005

conclusions across the country. Unpaid hospital bills, largely for the uninsured, are costing about \$45 billion nationally a year and adding about 8.5 percent to the cost of health insurance for those who do pay. Employers tell us that the rising cost trends are, in turn, adding to the growing numbers of people without insurance. And when those people check into hospitals, they generate even higher costs for those employers and consumers who pay insurance premiums.²

And, as the poll indicates, the voters get it. They are increasingly worried about the cost of care, and whether or not, even if they're insured, they will be destroyed financially by a catastrophic illness. Our poll found:

- ***68% of voters are satisfied with the quality of health care in Colorado and an equal number are dissatisfied with the total cost of health care, and***
- ***64% of people are concerned that they will not be able to pay their medical bills in an event of a serious illness.***

There is a clear consensus among those of us who provide medical care, and those whose children need that care, that it is time for all of us to come together and take care of our kids. Such action needs to be a collaborative effort among the private and public sectors, including federal and state policy makers.

Most of us don't choose to be sick or injured. Our children most certainly do not. The full measure of our worth as a society will be taken in how we care for our children. Together, we can restore and preserve the health and safety of this most precious resource, right here, and right now.

QUESTION & ANSWER: SUGGESTED RESPONSE

How was poll conducted?

Five hundred registered, likely voters were polled statewide by telephone from September 17 to 19. The random sample generated a representative pool of Colorado voters by demographic and political category.

What were the differences among voters on these questions?

While support for covering children was pretty much across the board, it was overwhelmingly positive among women of either political party, and of course minorities and lower and middle income workers.

Do conservatives really support what would be an expansion of government?

Self-described "conservatives" split evenly on the specific question—that all parents be required to insure their child along with a government subsidy as needed.

² See studies by Milliman for the Blues in California and Washington State, using 2004 data

Would voters really support this if they knew what it would cost?

Voters clearly understand this might come to some degree from their own pockets directly or indirectly, and have very little concern about this aspect. In a related question about a hypothetical gubernatorial candidate, voters by a two to one margin favored a candidate who would support this proposal if it involved raising taxes. Response rates on our side of the position outnumbered that view over 2 to 1.

Do you believe voters would actually step up in terms of financing this expansion with tax increases?

That is perhaps the most significant aspect in terms of reaching this political tipping point. Broad majorities across almost every category of voter say emphatically yes. We found this to be true in our test questions about an idealized gubernatorial candidate as well. There was no drop off in terms of supporting a gubernatorial candidate when the proposition was tied to the phrase, “even if it meant raising taxes.”

Do you support raising taxes to pay for this?

There are so many other options to improve the efficiencies and reduce the cost shifts that would be addressed long before that proposition. There is however broad voter support for the kinds of user fees that most states contemplate, such as surcharges on tobacco, alcohol, DWIs etc. Ironically, those perhaps less able to support any tax measures are those most inclined to pitch in, in order to get coverage. Again, it is costing taxpayers considerably more through their employers and their local tax bases by allowing more of their fellow Coloradoans, especially children, to go uninsured.

Will you endorse candidates who support children’s health issues?

Of course, and already have. And we’ll encourage our colleagues and patients to do likewise. In the Governor’s race, both candidates have acknowledged this urgent need.

Who do you blame for the high cost of health care?

It’s not a matter of blame. It’s simply the consequence of growing populations with growing demands for care, the inequities created by the uneven and inefficient access to that care, and the remarkable and continued scientific advances that allow us and our colleagues to do so much for patients that even a few years ago we couldn’t help...diagnostics, pharmaceuticals, transplants, and so on.

The Legislature authorized a Blue Ribbon Commission to study and make recommendations on system reform and access to care. How does this fit?

The Colorado Medical Society, along with our colleagues representing the medical specialty organizations, had already formed over a year ago a special physician congress to build a medical consensus for comprehensive system reform. We are already working with the Commission members and will obviously present this data to buttress their inclinations.

Who would oppose this?

Primarily affluent white males, who account for approximately twenty percent in this poll. Hospitals, employers and health plans will likely support any efforts to restore

timely care to children. It's just economic common sense, not mention compassionate conservatism.

Colorado's Medicaid and CHP programs are struggling. Won't this make it worse?

The only thing that will restore this program is funding it properly. Early access to care by children or adults saves money. Pay now, or pay a lot more later.