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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Faith leaders call Bush child health veto wrong moral choice, urge override

PICO National Network released the following statement from Rev. Heyward Wiggins, III in response to President Bush's veto of bi-partisan legislation to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

"Today, President Bush has made the wrong moral choice by putting politics ahead of children's health. People of faith across the United States prayed that President Bush would find the courage and wisdom to reverse course and sign bi-partisan children's health legislation. America's faith communities are committed to seeing this battle through to the finish. We will not accept one man standing between four million children and the health coverage they need to grow up strong and healthy.

Last week Republicans and Democrats in Congress made the right choice: children. By large bi-partisan majorities the House and Senate passed a strong children's health bill. Now faith leaders call on those Democrats and Republicans who voted against the bi-partisan compromise and those who failed to vote at all, to side with children and vote to override the President's veto.

Make no mistake; covering uninsured children is a clear moral choice facing every Member of Congress. If enough House members vote to override the President's veto, 4 million children who are now uninsured will have the hope of health coverage. If House members fail to stand up to President Bush's veto, those children will be left in limbo, without the ability to see a doctor and get the kind of preventive care that all children need.

The American people, including a large majority of Republican voters, Republicans and Democrats in Congress, 41 Governors and faith communities from across the theological spectrum all support the bipartisan legislation to cover uninsured children. Members of Congress from both parties worked for months to craft a compromise that would protect coverage for 6 million children and reach an additional 4 million children who would otherwise be uninsured. These children need health coverage not political rhetoric.

Last week the PICO network released a letter from 2,000 faith leaders to President Bush and Congress urging passage of strong bi-partisan children's health legislation. PICO has brought large groups of faith leaders and families to Washington to lobby for a strong SCHIP reauthorization five times since last November, including 400 clergy and families in March to secure a strong budget commitment for SCHIP. PICO federations organized more than 30 local town hall meetings and press events and generated 14,000 phone calls and e-mails from faith communities in support of the bi-partisan SCHIP agreement.

In the coming days, the drum beat to care for our children and pass SCHIP will only get stronger. Faith leaders will continue to preach and teach on this issue. People of faith will continue to press their representatives and President Bush to make a moral choice for children. In the coming weeks PICO will be coordinating a grassroots campaign by faith communities in targeted Congressional Districts to win support from members of Congress who voted no on SCHIP or failed to vote. With strong bi-partisan support from Republicans and Democrats, people of faith see a day when no child goes without treatment or relies on an emergency room for care because they lack coverage.

Later this month, the House will be asked to override the president's veto. This presents a second chance for those Republicans and Democrats who made the wrong choice – the political choice – last week. America's faith leaders stand united here today, to call upon those representatives: when you cast your vote this time, make the moral choice. Choose children."

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PICO National Network is a network of 53 faith-based organizations and one-thousand religious congregations working to revitalize neighborhoods and strengthen families in 150 cities and 18 states.

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