

Thank you, Commissioner O'Keefe.

I am glad to be standing up here today with a team.

I think we can all agree that having teammates is a good thing.

Together, all of these people - my Commissioners, the Health Plans, members of Children's Defense Fund and the rest of the health care community ... we are on the same team.

And our goal is the same:

For every kid in Minnesota to be healthy and have access to the best health care possible.

Minnesota is one of the best, if not THE best in the country when it comes to covering our kids with health insurance.

BUT we are not quite there yet....

The question we all ask ourselves is what do we need to do to get to every kid in Minnesota covered.

I think the answer is simple:

We have to work together, coordinate our talent and pool our resources in order to meet the challenge.

When I met with these folks a few months back about reaching kids that need health care, that's what they told me.

And they pledged to help lead the way in getting Minnesota kids the coverage that they ought to have.

That's why we are here today. To announce our new team and begin working together in a public private partnership.

Government has the programs. We've got MnCare and Medical Assistance but as successful as these programs are we still have kids who aren't getting the care they need.

In fact we are estimating that we still have approximately 48,000 kids without coverage. As many of you know we have been petitioning the federal government to allow Minnesota to receive S-CHIP monies to help finish the job we started with MnCARE.

While we haven't been successful yet I want to assure you that we will not give up the fight.

In fact, next week when I am in Washington D.C. I will be meeting will Secretary Tommy Thompson to continue our fight for federal funds to help us locate and cover those 40,000 kids.

But in the meantime these folks have stepped up to the plate to help is identify these kids.

As I said we have the programs but we need this team to help us get the kids to the programs.

This team has agreed to do things like, a major public relations campaign with Chris Carter to bring attention to the problem, extend their hours of service to accommodate families and kids and to take their clinic on the road to areas that may not be readily served.

I truly believe that by working together, we will make great strides in protecting and improving the health of Minnesota's children.

And finally, I want to remind everyone that while we all play a role in health care, the most important role is played by parents.

And we will continue to remind parents of this responsibility every day, with the help of my friend Cris Carter of the Minnesota Vikings.

He'll be appearing on billboards like the one you see here.

Some months back, When I approached Mr. Carter about the billboards, he recognized the importance of this initiative and generously agreed to work with us on this project.

Thank you Chris and Thanks to all our teammates.

Now let's go to work.

Now let me introduce Jim Koppel, the Director of the Children's Defense Fund in Minnesota.