

METRO

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CLOSE-UP: How parents can help their children achieve in school/B4

Cabinet member touts cash for Oregon

Health Secretary Donna Shalala says the state should capitalize on federal funds to provide insurance to low-income children

By PATRICK O'NEILL

of The Oregonian staff

Oregon ought to take full advantage of a federal program to provide health insurance to low-income children, Donna Shalala, secretary of health and human services, said Monday.

Speaking at a meeting of health care providers and children's health advocates in Wilsonville, Shalala said Oregon legislators should use as much as possible of the \$39 million per year in federal money earmarked for health insurance for children of the working poor.

Shalala was touting the benefits of the federal Children's Health Insurance Program, which is intended to help children who fall between the health coverage provided for the poor under state Medicaid programs and that provided by employer-based insurance.

"There ought to be no reason why legislators in this progressive state shouldn't come up with the match," she said.

The program, which began July 1 in Oregon, has enrolled about 4,000 children. Bob DiPrete, spokesman for the Oregon Office of Health Plan Policy and Research, said the proposed state budget for 1999 to 2002 includes about \$12 million to be used as matching funds for the program.

The program would cover an estimated 16,800 children younger than 19 whose families' incomes are less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level of \$2,767 a month for a family of four.

During her talk, Shalala did not refer to the White House sex scandal. Nor did anyone who attended the conference ask about it during a question-and-answer session.



SHALALA

Shalala: Few words on Clinton scandal

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Before the talk, however, Shalala told reporters that fallout from the report by independent counsel Kenneth Starr is having no effect on her ability to do her job or on her agency's performance.

She said she and other Cabinet members intend to "stay focused on our jobs," as requested by President Clinton.

Shalala reiterated an earlier public response in which she said she found Clinton's behavior "appalling."

Nonetheless, she said, Clinton, "has done a wonderful job for the country. . . . I can continue to work with him."

Asked about her reaction to the Starr report, Shalala replied that the issue "isn't about me — it's about the president and his behavior."

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