This is a primarily dermatologic issue of *Pediatric Annals*, ably guest edited by Dr. Sarah L. Stein, an Associate Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics at the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine. She has organized an excellent collection of articles on practical pediatric skin issues. Because dermatology always is a highly requested area in our readership surveys, we are pleased to be responsive to those who suggested topics for the journal.

Two very notable recent events directly impact pediatric care, namely the Supreme Court decision in favor of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and California’s support of mandatory vaccination of school children. These are truly historic events, and both will benefit the health of our children and society as a whole.

A huge milestone was reached on June 25, 2015, when the US Supreme Court voted 6-3 to allow the federal government to continue to provide tax subsidies to enable poor and middle class individuals to purchase health insurance. This ruling rejected highly partisan efforts to dismantle the ACA and prevented interference with the health care insurance for an estimated 6 million individuals and wreaking havoc in the insurance markets. The total number of uninsured individuals who gained coverage since 2010 (when 3 million previously uninsured young adults up to age 26 years first were included on their parents’ policies) ranges from 7 to 16.4 million, with the greatest gains in coverage among young adults, Hispanics, blacks, and low-income individuals.\(^1\) Improved availability of insurance also has been achieved through a health insurance marketplace (impacting 11.7 million Americans, 87% of whom have qualified for federal subsidies), and 10.8 million additional individuals have enrolled in Medicaid since the enactment of the ACA.\(^1\) Additionally, 8 to 12 million individuals with insurance outside the marketplaces have benefited from ACA policies that prevent discrimination against those with preexisting medical conditions and prevent termination of coverage because of illness. Overall, more than 30 million individuals now have insurance with new sources of coverage and/or consumer protections.\(^1\) The Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman has pointed out that, in states with full ACA implementation and expanded Medicaid, the percent of uninsured adults has dropped from 16% to 7.5% in just the last 2 years.\(^2\)

Others highlight that the number of Americans lacking health insurance coverage dropped 20% from 44.8 million in 2013 to 36 million in 2014.\(^3\) If all states were participating, this number would decline much more substantially. It is sobering and even unfathomable that some states are still fighting the expansion of health care to the uninsured within their states. For example, 3 weeks before the Supreme Court decision, Florida’s House of Representatives voted 72-41 to reject a plan to provide coverage to 650,000 individuals by using more than $18 billion in federal funds over 10 years to expand the pool of low-income citizens in Florida eligible for health insurance and to help them purchase coverage.\(^4\) Florida is one of the 22 states refusing to expand Medicaid under the ACA, and 4.8 million Floridians (24.2% of the population) are now uninsured, compared with 15.3% nationwide.\(^4\) Similar stories exist in other primarily southern states.

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doi: 10.3928/00904481-20150812-01
This is all important to us who treat children because the previously uninsured young adults who now have health coverage include vast numbers of young parents who will be better able to care for their children (our patients) without fear of bankruptcy from medical expenses and whose own health will be improved.

The second recent historic event that bodes very well for pediatrics and child health is that the California legislature passed, and Governor Jerry Brown promptly signed, legislation to end personal or religious exemptions to childhood vaccinations. Introduced by state Senator Dr. Richard Pan, a pediatrician, this legislation was in reaction to the steadily climbing number of unvaccinated children in California whose parents have claimed easy-to-obtain personal or religious exemptions to vaccines while taking advantage of the herd immunity provided by immunized children of other parents. The large measles outbreak late last year centered at Disneyland appeared to play a defining role in focusing atten-
tion on the fact that in some California schools almost half of the children were unvaccinated!

In California, it is distressing to note, the antivaccine forces were led by actress Jenny McCarthy (no surprise there) as well as by actor Jim Carrey and even more disappointingly by Robert Kennedy Jr., all of whom stooped to remarkable degrees of fear mongering and hysteria promotion. Kennedy equated a mandatory vaccination policy to the Holocaust (later apologizing); Carrey called Governor Brown a “corporate fascist” for signing the bill and suggested that vaccines today poison children with mercury and aluminum. Kennedy considers the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and vaccine manufacturers to be “shadowy peddlers of toxins that ruin children’s lives” and invokes conspiracy theories between the CDC and pharmaceutical companies that are making huge profits on vaccines. On a radio show in 2011, Kennedy said “I can see that this fraud is doing extraordinary damage to the brains of American children.”

Two other states, West Virginia and Mississippi, have had vaccination requirements similar to those just adopted by California. Illinois also recently passed a somewhat watered-down version of the California law, but one that at least makes exemptions somewhat more difficult to achieve.

One can hope that the California action suggests that positive steps may be taken in other states as well, for we know that California has often led the nation with respect to progressive legislation. However, we can’t underestimate the power of the antivaccine lobby in the US despite the overwhelming scientific evidence that favors vaccines. To quote Frank Bruni: “Although the Internet could be making all of us smarter, it makes many of us stupider, because it’s not just a magnet for the curious. It’s a sinkhole for the gullible.” I recently had an opportunity to personally thank and congratulate Mr. Bruni for his insightful and provocative writings.

THIS MONTH’S STAMPS

I have selected stamps from Curacao, Belgium, and the Czech Republic to accompany this column. The 2014 set of Curacao stamps highlights six different (primarily adult) forms of cancer: colon, breast, prostate, leukemia, lung, and cervical. The 2014 Czech stamp and the magnificent 2014 Belgian souvenir sheet both honor the 500th birthday of Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564). Vesalius is the Latinized form of the family’s name Wesel (weasel), which reflects the family’s origin in Wesel, Germany. Clearly an internationalist, Vesalius was born in Brussels, studied in Belgium (Flanders), Germany, and France, carried out his important work in Italy (Padua), which was printed in Switzerland, was a court physician in Spain and the Netherlands, and died in Greece. His great work De Humani Corporis Fabrica, Libri Septem (The Seven Books of the Structure of the Human Body) was published in Basel in 1543 and completely revolutionized medical thought by destroying the existing inaccuracies and errors regarding human anatomy dating back to Galen about 13 centuries earlier. Based on his extensive cadaveric dissections and accompanied by unmatched woodcuts from the workshop of the Renaissance master Titian, this work was termed the greatest medical book ever by Sir William Osler. Five of the prints from this work are shown on the Belgian souvenir sheet, and the famous portrait of Vesalius on the Czech stamp is also from the same anatomical work. In 2014, Northwestern professors D.H. Garrison (classics) and M.H. Hast (Medical School) published a magnificent two-volume annotated English translation of Vesalius’ master work, which is available from Karger Publishers for $1,650.

REFERENCES