

# Infant mortality requires action by community

Thanks to the Times-Union editorial for focusing attention on Jacksonville's recent increase in infant deaths.

Access to prenatal care is an important part of the solution, but it contributes only 10 percent to 15 percent to pregnancy outcomes.

The primary issues are far more complex. Reducing infant mortality in our community will require alleviation of socio-economic disparities, universal safe sleep practices, support for breastfeeding and expanded access to health care for women before and between pregnancies.

Jacksonville families most impacted by poor birth outcomes live in neighborhoods ravaged by poverty, violence, low educational attainment, limited access to healthy foods and limited employment opportunities. These stressors have a direct and measurable impact on pregnant women.

We will continue to see high and disparate infant mortality in Jacksonville until we muster the political will to address these conditions.

While we have made gains with respect to sleep-related deaths, too many infants are still dying from these causes. Sleep-related deaths account for nearly 40 percent of all mortality after the first month of life. An expanded communitywide awareness and education effort around safe sleep practices is critically important.

Strategies for preventing prematurity — the leading cause of infant death — are more complex.

Obesity, high blood pressure, tobacco use, unintended pregnancy, poor nutrition and other factors impact the health of women before and between pregnancy.

In nearly 80 percent of infant deaths, the general health of the mother prior to pregnancy is a contributing factor. Prenatal care comes too late to address these risks.

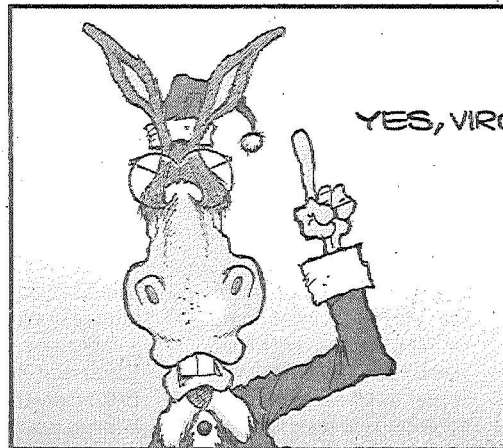
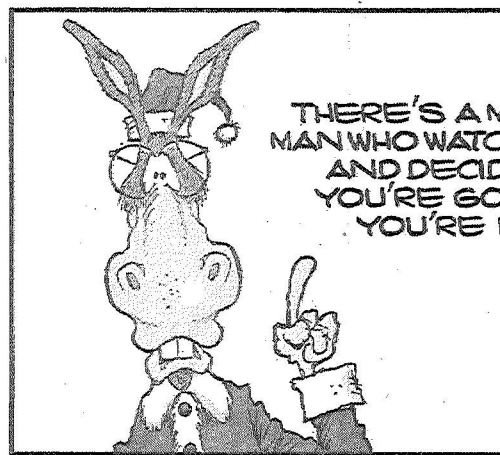
Support the expansion of Medicaid through the Affordable Care Act to all eligible Floridians.

Increase Healthy Start funding for expanded Safe Sleep education and outreach.

Establish all area hospitals as Baby Friendly Hospitals.

And use your political power and will to ensure Jacksonville is a place where all citizens can thrive.

Jeff Goldhagen, pediatrician, Jacksonville



## Letters from Readers

### BABY CRIB DONATIONS

#### Help reduce SIDS

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of North Florida, Inc. has kicked off their Cribs for Christmas campaign to help save the lives of babies.

Sunshine Health has generously donated \$500 toward the purchase of cribs.

Providing a crib to a baby, who would otherwise not have one, helps to reduce the possibility of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Other safe sleep recommendations include putting babies to sleep on their backs, alone in a crib with a firm mattress, free of toys, bumpers and blankets. Babies should not be kept too warm and should live in a smoke-free environment.

The infant mortality rate in Northeast Florida has risen for the second consecutive year.

Sleep-related deaths had been on a decline for the last several years but now are on the rise again.

The Cribs for Kids Program is part of a national program designed to save lives by providing babies with a safe place to sleep. Over 1,300 cribs have been granted by Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of North Florida since the program's inception in 2006.

For more information, call (904) 733-5004.

Tala Reynolds, executive director, Jacksonville