

Dear Fellow Texans,

You have undoubtedly heard and read a lot about Rick Perry's executive order requiring that Texas schoolgirls get vaccinated against the human papillomavirus, or HPV. Last September, I promised to do the very same thing if elected governor. While I continue to be very disappointed in the overall direction he is taking our state, in this particular instance Rick Perry has done the right thing. This is about protecting women's health, not about politics. I fully support his action and am asking you to do the same.

If young women don't get this vaccine now, hundreds of them will get cervical cancer and die. HPV causes cervical cancer, and the FDA has approved this vaccine and says it can prevent about 70% of cervical cancers that led to 391 deaths in Texas in 2006 alone. This is why the Center for Disease Control and the American Cancer Society recommend that all young women aged 11-12 get vaccinated, and it's why I called for this same action during the campaign.

Some of our libertarian-leaning Republican friends argue that vaccinating school children is not a proper function of government, and some of their socially conservative allies argue that protecting girls from a sexually transmitted virus will encourage promiscuity. Hogwash. I would answer both of these political factions by saying that punishing women for having pre-marital sex is not a proper role of government. In fact, protecting women from unknowingly contracting a cancer-causing virus protects their lives, not to mention their liberty. That is a proper role of government.

The fact that Rick Perry consciously opposed his own party in doing the right thing is, while quite surprising, to his credit. Now it's our responsibility as Texans to put politics aside and support the choice he made. The voices of support for the vaccination and the executive order are remaining awfully quiet. For years, Rick Perry has earned our opposition. Right now, with women's health at stake, he has earned our support, and without sacrificing the right to oppose him in the future, we must offer that support. If we don't, then we're the ones putting politics ahead of women's health.

Sincerely,

Chris Bell