

Excerpts from Some of the Editorials Supporting the Bipartisan Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization

New York Times – 9/25/07

Gunfight at the S-Chip Corral

President Bush accused Congressional Democrats of putting health coverage for poor children at risk by forcing him to veto a bill that he says is a dangerous step toward government-run health care. The opposite is the case. Mr. Bush is the one putting the health of America's children at risk, threatening to veto carefully crafted legislation that would reauthorize and expand the valuable State Children's Health Insurance Program, or S-chip.

We can only hope that fair-minded members of Congress will pass the compromise measure by veto-proof majorities this week. Otherwise, millions of low- and middle-income children would be denied access to a program that has played a critical role in reducing the number of uninsured children over the past decade.

To hear the president tell it, he has long supported the joint federal-state program, and his budget for fiscal year 2008 proposes an additional \$5 billion in federal funds spread over the next five years, a 20 percent increase over current levels. What he doesn't say is that this paltry sum is not even enough to provide continued coverage for all of the children who are currently enrolled, let alone enroll millions more of the uninsured.

A compromise bill approved in recent days by Congressional leaders would boost the funding by \$35 billion over the next five years, enough to enroll several million more children above the 6.6 million already participating. The bill deserves wide support....

All members of Congress now need to let Mr. Bush know that he is the one playing politics with the health of America's children and then pass this legislation with a veto-proof majority.

Washington Post – 9/21/07

Children's Care at Risk; The President Misses A Chance for A Sensible Compromise

President Bush's renewed vow yesterday to veto an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program was unfortunate. Mr. Bush has been threatening a veto for months now. But with the popular and important program set to expire at the end of the month, and congressional negotiators having retreated from the more aggressive and expensive House measure, Mr. Bush had an opportunity also to offer

compromise. Instead, at a guns-blazing news conference, he accused Democrats of "putting health coverage for poor children at risk so they can score political points in Washington" and said the Democrats' plans "would move millions of American children who now have private health insurance into government-run health care."

This argument would be more credible if the president were proposing a renewal of SCHIP that would at least maintain the decade-old program, which is designed to provide health insurance to children in families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid. Instead, the administration wants an increase of \$5 billion over five years, an amount that the Congressional Budget Office has said would fall short of what's needed simply to keep pace with current enrollment levels.

It's important to understand that most of the \$35 billion expansion that lawmakers -- including a significant number of Republican senators -- are proposing would go to enroll low-income children in Medicaid and SCHIP. ...

The Salt Lake Tribune – 9/23/07

Right on, Orrin!: Senator is right to oppose Bush over CHIP

How can a U.S. senator go wrong opposing an unpopular, lame-duck president who has alienated not only many Americans but a good number of his fellow Republicans? Well, we're talking about Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, who has long been a seeing-eye supporter of President Bush's policies - that is, until the president threatened the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Now, Hatch has his back up in defense of CHIP, a program he originally championed that has proven to be an excellent and efficient way to protect the health of the children of working families who can't afford health insurance.

We can only say: Right on, senator! To his great credit, Hatch is solidly behind a bipartisan compromise bill to reauthorize CHIP despite Bush's promise to veto any legislation that goes beyond the measly \$5 billion funding increase over five years that The Decider deems sufficient. Hatch is pushing a \$35 billion increase for CHIP over five years that would extend coverage to 4 million more needy children. The House is scheduled to vote on that compromise bill Tuesday.

Hatch, in his new role, went so far as to call Bush on the red herring the president raised in defense of his indefensible opposition. The compromise legislation, Bush claimed, would cover the children of families making \$83,000 a year! The senator calmly pointed out that the president was "absolutely wrong." Tell it, Orrin!

Bush has characterized CHIP as an "incremental step" toward government-run health care for all Americans. Hatch parried that any health-care bill could be thusly criticized. You go, senator! We should point out that for Utah's senior senator to direct any naysaying toward the White House falls somewhere between a rarity and the unheard-of. But Hatch has picked the right ground to fight on.

There are few, if any, more deserving causes than CHIP. The state-federal program provides health coverage to more than 6 million of the neediest Americans, and must be expanded to cover more. CHIP is the only safety net for these children, whose illnesses and injuries otherwise would be treated in pricey

emergency rooms (which Bush is on record as approving), with the bills coming due to all Americans in higher taxes and insurance premiums.

We urge all of Congress to follow Hatch's lead and reauthorize CHIP by a margin that will justly rip Bush's veto pen out of his hand.

The Arizona Daily Star (Tucson)- 9/22/07

Compromise Bill to Insure Kids Deserves to Pass

A much-needed and effective federal health-insurance program for children will end Sept. 30 unless Congress takes action and the White House moves off its ideological pedestal to do what is right for kids....Here we are, days before the State Children's Health Insurance Program expires, and our elected representatives are locked in a political battle over which children should be covered, who should pay for it and how to protect the private medical insurance marketplace.

The fault belongs at the doorstep of the White House. Both the U.S. House and Senate have approved bills that would, to varying degrees, expand the program known as SCHIP, to cover more kids ... A bipartisan compromise bill is evolving. According to the Washington Post on Friday, the compromise would increase SCHIP funding by \$35 billion...

This is a good compromise. It allows states to expand coverage to another 4 million uninsured children. Yet President Bush repeated this week his promise to veto any legislation that is more generous than what he wants. He calls for a \$5 billion increase over the next five years -- a proposal so puny it would end up cutting kids from SCHIP coverage because it won't even keep up with current costs.

The Congressional Budget Office says it will take \$14 billion over the next five years, in addition to existing funding, to maintain SCHIP at the status quo.

Bush tries to deflect criticism of his position by pretending the Democrats in Congress are trying to use the SCHIP reauthorization to federalize health insurance. Bush is wrong -- and too narrow in his criticism. Prominent Republicans, including Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, have gone on record supporting the compromise. This is not a Democratic endeavor; it's a bipartisan endeavor to save SCHIP for the kids now on it and to cover other kids who need it.

Bush contends the compromise would cover children in families with incomes over \$80,000 -- a claim that Hatch, who helped craft the compromise, said is untrue.

Health insurance coverage is a serious situation for many American families who don't have the luxury of making decisions solely by ideology. It's time for Bush to listen to Congress and think of the children.

La Crosse Tribune (Wisconsin) – 9/23/07

It's Time to Reauthorize Children's Health Insurance

President Bush is allowing ideology to prevent millions of children from receiving health insurance.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program, which goes by the acronym SCHIP, has been a popular program that allows the state and federal government to work together to provide health insurance for children of families that don't qualify for Medicaid but don't earn enough to afford insurance. Wisconsin has used the SCHIP program to help pay for insurance for children under the BadgerCare program.

SCHIP does not reinvent the insurance process, nor does it represent a "socialized medicine" intrusion into the private sector. States run the program, under rules developed by the federal government. In the states, the program is regarded as successful in reducing the number of children without health insurance. But even with SCHIP, there remain about 9 million uninsured children....

[President Bush] wants to spend \$5 billion [on CHIP] instead of \$35 billion. Unfortunately, that will leave far too many children without health coverage. On Thursday, Bush challenged Democrats to pass the modest proposal he supports. Then he said, "If they fail to do so, more than a million children could lose health coverage." That took a lot of nerve. If Congress does what Bush wants, several million children will be without coverage.

A compromise proposal attempts to drop some parts of the bill that are objectionable to the White House but keeps the 61-cent-a-pack cigarette tax increase that helps pay for the program. Bush still says he will veto it. He calls it an expansion of "government-run health care" that could lead to shortages and rationing of care. He also said the bill would send the nation "down the path to government-run health care for every American."

That's a little baffling considering that the president approved a \$90-billion-a-year Medicare drug plan. How is a much more modest attempt to provide health care to children so threatening to American capitalism? The president's apocalyptic description of the plan is unfair, and it exaggerates what the federal-state partnership actually does. Access to health care -- particularly for the most vulnerable segments of society -- is one of the top issues of the day. The president needs to stop the scare tactics and adopt a more realistic approach. Let's allow the states the resources they need to provide health care to those who can't afford it.

Bangor Daily News (Maine) – 9/24/07

SCHIP'S Presidential "Help"

President Bush helped advance the debate over a children's health insurance bill this summer by refusing to engage in support of either the House or Senate versions, thereby driving Congress to a solid compromise on expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Now he has helped out again by so badly characterizing what the bill would do that wavering members of Congress can be assured that the compromise expansion is the right move.

SCHIP, as the program is known, provides federal subsidies, matched with state dollars, to offer health care coverage to children whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid. The program covers about 4 million children a month. The question in Congress is to what extent SCHIP should be expanded and how it should be funded. The compromise answer from negotiators ended up close to the version produced by the Senate: an additional \$35 billion to a total of \$60 billion over five years, paid for with a tax increase on tobacco sales.

The program is scheduled to expire Sept. 30 unless reauthorized. President Bush has promised to veto the bill if it arrives with the expansion as currently proposed. Instead, the president has for months insisted on increasing the program by \$5 billion, a figure that would not cover inflation, and his administration has suggested new rules limiting enrollment. The president's argument, made again this week, is that "Democratic leaders in Congress want to put more power in the hands of government by expanding federal health care programs." He, on the other hand, believes "the best approach is to put more power in the hands of individuals by empowering people and their doctors to make health care decisions that are right for them."

A very nice thought, but the president misses the detail that people with lower incomes and no health coverage do not have doctors to consult because they can't afford them. And SCHIP doesn't stand between patients and doctors - it provides coverage to put them together. This intentional misunderstanding demonstrates better than anything else that the president is not serious about his argument. He merely wants to pay less for a program without regard for the results.

Among those "Democrats" who support an expanded SCHIP are Maine Republican Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe (along with the state's Reps. Mike Michaud and Tom Allen) and 16 other Senate Republicans. As much as he may wish it, this is not a party fight. And SCHIP expansion has broad bipartisan support. The holdup is primarily in the White House, which apparently will say anything to try to restrict this valuable service.

The News & Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina) – 9/23/07

Covering the Kids

President Bush and Congress are entangled in a confrontation over a federal/state program that subsidizes health insurance for children of the working poor who are not covered by Medicaid. At the end of the day, the upper hand should go to Congress, where a majority including Republicans and Democrats wants to extend and expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

The congressional proposal would cost an additional \$35 billion over five years, and cover an additional 4 million children along with the 6.6 million currently enrolled. Bush favors only a fraction of that. He says the proposed expansion goes beyond the original intent of helping poor children and would likely make some kids eligible whose families can afford to buy private insurance.

That, of course, causes the president to trot out scary phrases about "federalized medicine" and the dangers in a national health care system. All that's missing is a Halloween mask. Unfortunately for him, the old rhetorical bogeyman of a national health care system no longer packs much of a punch. For one reason, the number of Americans uninsured for health care has gone markedly higher during Bush's time in office. In 2001, roughly 41 million people didn't have health insurance. The Census Bureau's 2005 figures put the number at 46.6 million, and it's likely higher today. It will go higher still if the children's health program expires on Sept. 30, which it is set to do.

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer – 9/23/07

Children's Health

President Bush's bring-'em-on determination to block expansion of American kids' access to health coverage is deeply troubling. Washington's entire congressional delegation should focus on areas of

agreement to continue the state's and the nation's long, bipartisan efforts to provide insurance to more kids from low- and lower-middle-income families.

This state has long been a leader in efforts to enroll more children in coverage and provide the kind of routine health care found in other advanced countries. But, nationally, the number of children without health coverage hit a record 8.7 million last year. In part because of lack of health coverage and preventive treatment, this country ranks near the bottom among developed countries in terms of children's well-being. Expanding coverage should be a matter of pride and principle for congressional members from Washington and the rest of the country.

Members of a Senate-House conference committee have been working on a compromise measure that would allow new coverage for several million uninsured children nationally. But the president threw more oil onto the partisan fire he has provoked, challenging Democrats Thursday to pass an extension of the current program.

That is absurd, coming from the same president who earlier wouldn't wait for Senate Republicans to finish work on an excellent expansion compromise before promising a veto. Bush is blatantly misrepresenting compassionate expansion as a step toward government takeover of health care.

Charlotte Observer (North Carolina) – 9/23/07

Toying With Children

... it's President Bush who has drawn a line in the sand with a plan that won't provide help for the thousands of children who need it, and whose veto would cut benefits to many of those who are covered now.

The president's demagoguery in this matter is painfully obvious. The Congressional Budget Office has said his recommended \$1 billion a year increase for the next five years is insufficient for covering the cost of insuring all those currently eligible and enrolled....

Last week lawmakers - including some Republicans - crafted a compromise to boost funding by \$35 billion, paid for with a higher tobacco tax. That comes closer to meeting the need. Mr. Bush says he'll veto that plan too. The only renewal plan he favors is his own, saying the other proposals only encourage families to abandon private insurance as states have expanded the program to include middle-income families.

That's a red herring. Financial woes, rising health care costs and reductions in employer-provided insurance have left many higher-income families without the resources to pay for health insurance. A recent Census report confirms that. States are looking out for the welfare of children by providing SCHIP coverage.

Yet most of the children insured under SCHIP are exactly the ones Congress had in mind when the program was set up. They are in families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid, but not high enough to afford private coverage. And SCHIP has reduced by a third the uninsurance rate of eligible low-income children.

Sadly, the program has been underfunded since its inception a decade ago. A new federal requirement that states insure 95 percent of the lowest-income children before expanding to others is laughable. Federal funding doesn't even cover all currently eligible and enrolled children. N.C. Gov. Mike Easley pointed that

out in a letter to lawmakers his week: "It is a false choice, requiring us to serve children without providing enough money to do so."

Gov. Easley was equally blunt about the consequences of inaction on this matter. "North Carolina will run out of federal money in October. Without federal funds, we would have to suspend the program completely by the end of the year. Even if Congress agrees to continue the program at current funding levels, North Carolina will be short \$30 million in federal funds by next August, or the cost of serving 15,000 children for a year. "

SCHIP funding expires in less than two weeks. Congress and the president must act now in the best interests of children in need.

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