

Reps. Murphy, Courtney Call on President to Stop Playing Politics with Children's Health Care

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the federal program that provides more than 6.6 million children nationwide with health care is about to expire, today Representatives Joe Courtney (CT-02) and Chris Murphy (CT-05) called on President Bush to reverse his veto threat and sign bipartisan legislation to expand the program to cover ten million children. President Bush has pledged to veto the legislation, and has instead expressed support for his own State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) proposal – which would result in 840,000 low-income kids losing their health care coverage, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

"As a society, we bear the responsibility to protect the neediest members of our society, and with SCHIP, we've made important strides toward that goal. The President is determined to run out the clock on his remaining time in office by stonewalling Congress' positive legislative agenda, even if that means denying health care to uninsured children. Today, with a bipartisan majority, the House will stand up to his tactics and pass the SCHIP bill," said Murphy.

"The debate is simple – one either supports America's kids or does not. Pledging to veto this carefully crafted and bipartisan SCHIP reauthorization tells us that the President's priorities are not with the kids of eastern Connecticut or the nation. Congress has a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable among us and I am proud to support the SCHIP bill today," stated Courtney.

Today, the House of Representatives will pass the SCHIP reauthorization, which supports HUSKY B in Connecticut. The five year reauthorization of the program, which expires on September 30th, will provide thousands of Connecticut's children with coverage, and expand coverage to approximately four million children across the nation currently eligible for, but not enrolled in, SCHIP programs. The existing SCHIP program has proven to be extremely successful – it has cut the number of uninsured children by one-third nationwide in the last decade. HUSKY B currently covers more than 23,000 kids in Connecticut.

This bill is specifically designed to target the lowest-income uninsured American children for health care coverage – more than 90 percent of children covered under SCHIP lives in a family of four earning less than \$41,000 a year. The bill ensures that States have the resources they need to cover these children, while continuing to give them the flexibility to provide children's coverage through whatever delivery arrangement is most effective, whether through an HMO, PPO, or other arrangement. This legislation also contains a number of provisions to strengthen the coverage that they receive, including assured coverage of dental care. Further, mental health care services will be treated equally with physical health benefits.

"The President calls the SCHIP reauthorization excessive spending, but yet the White House has asked Congress for another \$200 billion in 2008 to rebuild Iraq and improve the lives of Iraqis. When will America's families and children once again become a priority of this Administration? I will support the SCHIP reauthorization today and urge the President to do the same when we send it to him for his signature," stated Courtney.

"Health care costs are skyrocketing, and the best we can do for our kids is to make sure that they don't get lost in this mess. Congress has to fix our broken health care system, and this SCHIP bill is a great first step in the process," said Murphy.

This legislation is supported by 43 Governors and more than 270 organizations representing millions of Americans, including such diverse groups as the American Medical Association, America's Health Insurance Plans, Healthcare Leadership Council, AARP, Families USA, and Catholic Charities.

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