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Washington, D.C. - Today, the U.S. House of Representatives will attempt to override the President's veto children's health care by extending the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Rep. Doris Matsui (CA-05) called on her colleagues to protect America's most vulnerable asset—its children—by voting to override the President's shortsighted veto of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (H.R. 976).

In California alone, 830,000 children receive benefits through the state's \$1.3 billion program. Without an extension of SCHIP, California's program will run out in June, leaving more than 13,000 Sacramento children without health insurance. In fact, the President's veto has already begun to undermine this established program. In a Washington Post article on Oct. 16, 2007, state SCHIP director Lesley Cummings recommended "adopting emergency regulations that would allow state officials to establish a waiting list and a process for cutting some kids off."

"It is simply an abomination that the President would allow this valuable and popular program to end. He has engaged in grandstanding in lieu of protecting our children. We will continue to work to make sure that the 10 million kids who could be insured under SCHIP will not be denied this service," said Rep. Matsui.

Last week, the President vetoed the bill, despite its broad and bipartisan support. SCHIP was backed by similar, bipartisan majorities when it was originally enacted in 1997. It is designed to provide coverage to children whose families make too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough for private insurance. At a cost of \$3.50 per child per day, SCHIP covers children and helps decrease further financial taxpayer burdens by providing preventative health care.

The legislation provides resources for states to reach out to children who are eligible to participate in SCHIP but not currently enrolled. The bill will invest \$35 billion over the next five years to continue the coverage of the 6 million children who currently receive health insurance through the program, and extend coverage to 4 million additional kids. The President's proposal would not even continue coverage for the children currently enrolled in SCHIP, forcing states to create waiting lists and discontinue coverage to families who rely on SCHIP for basic health insurance.

“This Congress is dedicated to taking America in a new direction, and returning to our core values and priorities. We have crafted a responsible piece of legislation that enjoys industry-wide endorsement and bipartisan support. It is unthinkable that the President and some Republicans in Congress are willing to let partisanship get in the way of giving American children a healthy start in life,” said Rep. Matsui.

In contrast to the claims made by the Bush Administration, H.R. 976 targets the country’s lowest-income, uninsured children for outreach and coverage. The SCHIP program focuses virtually all of its resources on children in the poorest of working families – fewer than 1 in 10 children covered under SCHIP lives in a family of four earning more than \$41,000 a year. This is how the program will remain under the bill.

The legislation also makes dramatic improvements in the current system by providing quality dental coverage to children, and requiring that states offer mental health services on par with the medical and surgical benefits already offered under SCHIP. It also provides incentives to the states to enroll eligible children, establishing \$100 million in grants for new outreach activities to states, local governments, schools, community-based organizations, safety-net providers and others.

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