

WASHINGTON, D.C – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) today voted to support the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and override the President's veto of bipartisan legislation to provide health care to 10 million children. One hundred and fifty-one House Republicans sided with President Bush to sustain the veto, and to block coverage for an additional 3.8 million children who are eligible but not enrolled in the current program. More than 100,000 children in Maryland currently receive care through CHIP, and the bipartisan plan vetoed by the President would have extended care this year to 20,000 additional eligible children.

"It is unfortunate and most disappointing that House Republicans chose once again to support President Bush's veto denying 3.8 million additional children health care under the Children's Health Insurance Program," said Rep. Hoyer. "The timing could not be worse. With the economy showing signs of distress, access to health care for children through CHIP is more critical than ever."

Worsening economic conditions are anticipated to create substantial increases in demand for enrollment in states' Medicaid and CHIP programs over the next few years, even apart from the normal growth trend in public coverage. If employment growth continues to fall - or regress as it did last month - more Americans are likely to lose their employer-sponsored health insurance. Economic analysts estimate that when the unemployment rate rises by one percentage point, the number of uninsured increases by 1.2 million to 1.5 million people. Indeed, during every economic downturn, the number of uninsured has risen.

"When unemployment increases, so do the number of Americans without health insurance," Rep. Hoyer said. "In this weak economy, more American children are at risk of going without health care. As a result, the CHIP is likely to become more important in providing our children with the health care they need and deserve."

The legislation vetoed by the President provided a \$35 billion expansion of the CHIP program and would have provided health care coverage to 10 million children. The legislation was backed by Republicans and Democrats in both houses of Congress and enjoyed support from Governors of both parties. Additionally, a series of new polls indicated overwhelming public support for CHIP, with as much as 81 percent of the country backing the bipartisan Congressional plan.

After today's vote, Rep. Hoyer vowed to continue to fight in Washington to enact legislation to provide health care for 10 million children this year. The existing CHIP program was extended in December until March 2009—but, without this legislation, 3.8 million additional low-income children who are eligible but not enrolled will now not be covered under the program. In addition, state budget shortfalls and administrative rules from President Bush put children who are covered now in jeopardy of losing health care.

“Despite the rigid opposition of the President and his allies in Congress, the fight for children's health care will go on,” stated Rep. Hoyer “I will continue to work with my colleagues on strengthening CHIP, because we cannot rest until this Congress succeeds in enacting a plan that will ensure that 10 million children have health care coverage.”

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