



THE UTAH HEALTH POLICY PROJECT

Quality Health Care Coverage for All Utahns

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Media Advisory

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Congress Poised to Help Provide Health Coverage to Additional Uninsured Children in Utah

A new Families USA report finds that the number of uninsured children in Utah, estimated at 78,500, could be reduced an additional 41% to 48%

Senator Orrin Hatch and other Senate and U.S. House leaders are meeting this month to work out differences between their separate versions of legislation that reauthorizes the 10-year-old State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The House and Senate are pushing ahead on reconciling their separate bills, despite the cloud of a presidential veto threat and new administrative roadblocks.

The Senate bill, developed by a bipartisan coalition including Senator Hatch, and the House bill, which was strongly supported by Representative Jim Matheson, could provide additional funding to provide health coverage for as many as five million of the nation's estimated 9 million uninsured children.

This additional funding is good news for Utah, which has an estimated 78,500 uninsured children. As currently approved, the Senate bill would cut the state's rolls of uninsured children by an estimated 31,800, or 41% of the total. The House version will reduce the number of Utah's uninsured children by 38,400, or 48%.

Federal legislators face a number of challenges in their efforts to renew and enhance SCHIP, including trying to meet the September 30 expiration of the original program. A far greater challenge, however, has been posed by President Bush, who has repeatedly stated his intention to veto the new bill and whose administration this month issued new guidelines that undercut the original flexibility given to states to implement the program.

"With the renewal of SCHIP, we have an opportunity to build on one of the greatest legislative success stories in recent years," Ron Pollack, Executive Director of Families USA said today. "Leaders of both parties in Congress recognize the importance of giving our children access to quality health care that will enable them to develop into healthy and productive citizens."

Pollack called attention to the fact that a presidential veto will not only halt the efforts to enroll more uninsured children in state health plans but will also throw millions of children already enrolled in SCHIP out of the program.

“In the midst of what the nation has come to recognize as a crisis in our entire system of health care delivery, the president’s veto would be an astounding step backwards,” Pollack said. “It would repudiate the funding requests from Republican and Democratic governors, who are trying to provide health coverage to their states’ uninsured children.”

“Most of all, it would deny millions upon millions of young Americans access to critical health care services outside of the emergency room.”

Congress will take up the SCHIP reauthorization again this month. As senators and House members work toward final legislation that will increase coverage for children, they will also need to address the recent Bush Administration’s policy changes that undercut states’ ability to enroll additional uninsured children.

Lincoln Nehring, Medicaid Policy Director at the Utah Health Policy Project, said that the Families USA report was “further evidence that SCHIP provides the foundation to ensuring that we reach our ultimate goal: making sure all our kids receive the health care they need.” “The CHIP bill being promoted by Senator Hatch gives Utah the opportunity to cut the number of uninsured children nearly in half,” Nehring said. “Clearly, thousands of Utah families win if this legislation is signed by the President.”

The Families USA report on the impact of the proposed SCHIP legislation – both House and Senate version – on the number of uninsured children in each state is available at

www.familiesusa.org/assets/pdfs/chip-kids-waiting.

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