

## **Op-Ed; Children's health must be nation's priority**

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**Document Text**

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For a parent, nothing is more important than the health of our children, and nothing more frightening than the fear that when a child gets sick, a visit to the doctor is out of reach.

This week, Washington has a great opportunity to insure millions more children among the 9 million who currently lack health insurance.

Instead, when it comes to insuring all of America's children, a cautious Congress and a stubborn Republican president are offering the voters a disappointing choice: do far too little, or do nothing at all.

I intend to fight for a better option and will ask my colleagues in the Senate to vote on a measure adding \$50 billion over to the next five years to the S-CHIP program - a wildly-successful children's health care program that today insures 6.6 million kids.

The current modest bipartisan proposal would spend \$35 billion over five years - far too little.

We have been modest where we should have been bold. If we, as senators, don't stand for insuring every child in America, then what do we stand for? If America can spend \$10 billion each month in Iraq, surely we can also spend \$10 billion each year on children's health.

Even more troubling, the president has launched a disinformation campaign to denounce this bill as a larger Democratic strategy or plot to massively expand federalized medicine. He has stubbornly pledged to veto a bill he hasn't even read. Apparently, confronted with a bipartisan compromise to extend health care coverage to half of the 9 million American children without insurance today, the president sees only a vast, left-wing conspiracy.

The S-CHIP program is not some Democratic plot to socialize medicine. It's a successful bipartisan initiative passed by a Republican Congress under President Clinton. It covers children from families whose income is just above Medicaid eligibility but far too low to afford private insurance coverage. And it's not government-run, either: the vast majority of S-CHIP enrollees receive their coverage through private insurance plans.

Today, Republican governors like Mitch Daniels in Indiana - Bush's former budget chief - have done more to implement and expand it than even some of their Democratic counterparts. These governors understand that, with the cost of private insurance for that same family approaching \$12,000 per year, the president is wrong to say that S-CHIP would be pushing families like these from private to government health care. For most eligible families, the real choice is this: S-CHIP or no health care at all.

Who benefits from S-CHIP? People like 9-year-old Alexsiana Lewis of Springfield, who was losing her vision due to a rare eye disease. Alexsiana's mother Dedra lost her health insurance benefits when she cut back her hours to care for her daughter.

"If I didn't have S-CHIP-funded MassHealth right now, my daughter would be blind," Dedra said.

This boils down to a question of priorities. Washington politicians like to talk about values, but here's a simple test of who actually values families: how much is it worth to you to insure every child in America?

America stands behind our children and Democrats in Congress should not bend to pressure from the White House, Republicans, or special interests.

Today the president calls a \$35 billion investment in children's health care a massive expansion of federalized medicine. I call it a good start. Now let's get to work on a bipartisan downpayment on universal health care for all of our children.

John F. Kerry is the junior senator from Massachusetts.

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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