



## CHILDREN'S HEALTH IS POLITICAL BATTLEGROUND

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*Recent political ads featuring images of children with a narrator saying "George Bush just vetoed Abby" are the latest weapons in a battle between Republicans and Democrats over The State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP.*

Democrats tried unsuccessfully last week to override the president's veto of a bill expanding the SCHIP legislation.

The debate pits Democrats, who say too many children are uninsured, against the president and most Republicans, who say expanding the program would entice middle-class families to give up their private insurance in favor of a government-sponsored program.

### **History of SCHIP**

SCHIP was created in 1997 to reduce the number of uninsured children in the United States by providing subsidized insurance to low income families.

When a child is uninsured, they often can't afford to see a doctor. Because they don't have regular check-ups, many uninsured people wind up in a hospital emergency room if they fall ill.

SCHIP has been considered successful -- in 2005, 16 percent of children whose families had income that amounted to less than twice the federal poverty level (around \$40,000) were uninsured, compared to 23 percent in 1997.

Still, a high number of American children --approximately 8 million -- remain uninsured and nearly 30 percent of children eligible for the program have yet to enroll.

### **Democrats challenge the president**

In July 2007, Democrats crafted a bill that would expand SCHIP by \$35 billion over a five-year period, far beyond the \$5 billion President Bush had budgeted for the same timeframe. Raising the tax on cigarettes would fund the expansion.

President Bush vetoed the measure on Oct. 3, 2007 believing it would "federalize health care."

Many Republicans believe health insurance should remain private, meaning that Americans should be covered by the companies they work for.

On Oct. 18, the House of Representatives fell 13 votes short (273-156) of the two-thirds majority required to override the veto. Forty-four Republicans joined the 229 Democrats in supporting the measure. Eight Democrats voted against it.

The House passed a revised bill on Oct. 25 again attempting to expand the program but it too fell short of securing the required votes to override the president's veto.

### **SCHIP could become election issue**

Amid the face-off, Democrats have called for an extension of the existing SCHIP program through next summer. The next vote on the program would then take place in the fall of 2008, just ahead of the presidential election.

So expect to see more of those commercials.

Democrats have painted opposition to the bill as voting against children.

“To be a great nation we have to take care of the health of our children. It should almost go without saying, but it doesn’t. There is every compassionate humanitarian, motherly, fatherly, and family reason to be for this legislation,” said Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California.

Republicans, like House leader John Boehner of Ohio, dismiss the proposal as “nothing more than a political game, getting ready for the next election.”

Republican Rep. Thomas Reynolds of New York called the override attempt “raw politics – trotting out a vote, just for the sake of a vote.”

Democrats insist that the revised bill addresses the Republican concerns with the initial expansion bill.

Among the revisions are an end to coverage of childless adults and a ban on insuring illegal immigrants.

Still, President Bush says his concerns have not been addressed “in a meaningful way,” and dismisses the bill as “more of the same.”

-- *Compiled by Steve Goldbloom for NewsHour Extra*

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