



# VIEWPOINT

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## Veto it, for the children

By Marc Kilmer



***Expanding SCHIP will place millions more children into substandard care and cost taxpayers billions of dollars.***

Bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate have passed a bill to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Democrats are salivating at the prospect of the President's promised veto of this bill. The reality, however, is that expanding SCHIP will actually hurt kids, not help them. The true champions of children's health care are the President and politicians who voted against the bill. These politicians, not those shamelessly exploiting the issue, are the ones looking out for the best interests of not only the children, but of taxpayers.

SCHIP was established ten years ago to help provide health insurance for poor children. Supporters of the program continue to portray it as sticking to this original purpose. However, states have used SCHIP money to provide health care for children in middle class families and to adults. States like Ohio have expanded coverage to kids in families at 300 percent of the federal poverty level. That has driven up the cost to taxpayers and led to more children being enrolled in substandard care.

What was intended as a small supplemental program for the poor has turned into a large entitlement program for the middle class. And, frankly, the middle class doesn't need it. In Ohio, most children in families between 200 percent and 300 percent of the federal poverty level (the kids covered by the program's expansion) already have private insurance. And studies have shown that many, if not most, of the kids who will enroll in the expanded program could have had private insurance.

The SCHIP issue is about symbolism over substance. Those who support it know that most Americans do not pay attention to the intricacies of the health insurance debate. These politicians know that if they label SCHIP as paying for health insurance for the "poor and working class who cannot afford private insurance" then they will score political points. And, unfortunately, they are right.

It takes a strong politician to stand up against a program "for the kids." It takes an even stronger one to stand up against a program "for the poor kids." But this fight is not about "the kids" or even the "poor kids." The President has forwarded a proposal that would cover poor kids. In fact, his administration recently enacted rules to ensure that poor kids are served by this program before middle class children and adults. Of course, this common sense plan was attacked by the group that is pushing for SCHIP expansion.

The President realizes that increasing funding for SCHIP by \$7 billion a year over the next ten years will do little to help the poor who cannot afford insurance. Instead, families who would have chosen private health insurance will move to government health care. Kids who would have had better private care will instead be using substandard government care. And the taxpayer will pick up the tab for families who could afford insurance without help.

The President's case against the bill would have been stronger if he had shown more backbone earlier in his term and vetoed other spending measures. But just because the President is jumping on the fiscal responsibility bandwagon a little late does not mean he is wrong. The plan's price tag of \$60 billion over 10 years is a large chunk of change at a time when the federal government is facing deficits as far as the eye can see. And to spend this amount of money on something that is not even needed is foolish.

Often in Washington politicians are afraid to stand up against programs that appear worthy in a sound bite. It took courage for members of Congress to vote against a bill that received such laudatory praise from politicians and the media. It will take guts for the President to veto such a bill.

There is a better way to reform our nation's health system. Congress must get back to work and craft a healthcare solution that will not put millions more children into an inferior program.

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