

UNDERSTANDING SCHIP

Facts Remain About Kids' Insurance After Override Attempt

The U.S. House of Representatives today fell short of the needed two-thirds majority — 273-156 — in an attempt to override President Bush's veto of legislation to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program to reach more working families.

IN IOWA, SCHIP REACHES MANY THOUSANDS, BUT MORE NEEDED

- There are 37,000 Iowa kids among the 6 million served nationally by the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP, a joint federal-state program to provide insurance for kids in working families that make just too much to qualify for Medicaid but still not enough to afford insurance privately either through their employment or independently.
- Of the 37,000 in Iowa, about 22,000 are served by the SCHIP-funded Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa program, known as hawk-i. The rest are covered in an expansion of Medicaid.
- If Iowa is to move forward and improve access to health care for the 44,000 Iowa children who are uninsured, federal financial participation is necessary. Iowa state legislators and Governor Culver this year moved forward in a bipartisan plan to cover 10,500 more children, but this requires reauthorization at the level and scope of the plan passed by Congress with wide bipartisan majorities and vetoed by President Bush.
- Both of Iowa's senators, Chuck Grassley and Tom Harkin, have supported the plan in Congress, as have four of the state's five members of the House — Bruce Braley, Dave Loebsack, Leonard Boswell and Tom Latham. Steve King is opposed. Senator Grassley helped to craft the compromise legislation and has actively promoted it in his role as ranking Republican member of the Senate Finance Committee.

SCHIP CURRENTLY TARGETS HELP TO LOW-INCOME UNINSURED

- An analysis this month from the Urban Institute notes that 9 in 10 children currently enrolled in SCHIP are in families with income below 200 percent of the federal poverty line (\$41,300 for a family of four). See the six-page report. <<http://www.urban.org/publications/411557.html>>

SCHIP AS FUNDED CANNOT REACH MANY LOW-INCOME UNINSURED

- The same Urban Institute report points out that three-fourths of the uninsured children who are not enrolled also are in families below 200 percent of poverty, many at incomes low enough to qualify for Medicaid.
"While the congressional bill includes funding and policy changes aimed at increasing enrollment of these children in Medicaid at little or no cost to the families, families in this income bracket would receive little or no subsidy from the administration's tax-based approach." <<http://www.urban.org/publications/411557.html>>

VETOED BILL HAD TARGETED HELP TO LOW-INCOME UNINSURED

- As noted in a recent summary by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), the Congressional Budget Office has found that nearly two-thirds of those who would gain coverage under the Children's Health Insurance Program legislation would otherwise be uninsured.
"That makes the bill considerably more efficient than the Administration's proposals to provide tax breaks for the purchase of private health insurance in the individual market," CBPP noted in an Oct. 5 "Policy Points" sheet. <<http://www.cbpp.org/policy-points10-5-07.htm>>

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PRESIDENT’S ALTERNATIVE MISSES STATED TARGET

■ Also as CBPP noted, respected MIT economist Jonathan Gruber, whose work has been quoted by the administration, has found that “less than one-quarter of the benefits of the tax breaks proposed by the administration would go to people who would otherwise be uninsured.”

PRIVATE MARKET CROWDS OUT MILLIONS FROM INSURANCE

■ The “State of Working Iowa 2007” from the Iowa Policy Project documented this trend in Iowa. See the one-page summary: <<http://www.iowapolicyproject.org/2007docs/SWI07-upndown.pdf>>.

Iowa has had anemic job growth in recent years, and the growing sectors on average have lower pay and fewer benefits than the declining sectors. That means our job trends in Iowa’s economy increasingly lead working people to find health coverage individually, which is expensive — or not to be covered unless they are eligible for public help. SCHIP enables many of these Iowans to get coverage at least for their kids.

The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is a joint initiative of the Iowa Policy Project (IPP) and the Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC), two Iowa-based, nonpartisan organizations. Visit the Iowa Fiscal Partnership on the web at <<http://www.iowafiscal.org>>. For more information about SCHIP and Iowa, contact Mike Owen at the IPP (319) 338-0773, or Carrie Fitzgerald at CFPC (515) 280-9027.