



PRESS RELEASE

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National polls show overwhelming support for children's health program President threatens veto of popular SCHIP; Congress looks to override

ALBUQUERQUE—Two recent national polls show that American voters overwhelmingly support health insurance for children via the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The program is currently before Congress for reauthorization but President Bush is picking a fight over the issue.

In a poll released Tuesday by First Focus, a bipartisan organization headed by Colin Powell dedicated to making children's issues a bigger priority in federal policy, showed that 83 percent support renewing SCHIP. An even larger majority – 90 percent – believe that every child in America has a right to basic health care. The poll was conducted by renowned GOP pollster Frank Luntz and his firm Luntz, Maslansky Strategic Research.

Similarly, a poll released Monday by Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families showed 91 percent of Americans want Congress to help states cover more uninsured children. That poll was conducted by a bipartisan team of pollsters, Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint. Both polls showed voter support for SCHIP across party lines.

Nationwide, 9 million children lack health insurance. New Mexico has the second highest rate of uninsured children in the country.

SCHIP, which was created in 1997 with strong bipartisan support, covers children whose families make too much to qualify for Medicaid, but do not have access to private insurance. Last week the Senate Finance Committee agreed to add \$35 billion to the SCHIP reauthorization. That amount would maintain current coverage for the 6.6 million children now in the program and add 3.2 million more children over the next five years. New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman, who sits on that committee, supported the expansion. So did ranking GOP members Sens. Orrin Hatch and Chuck Grassley.

President Bush, however, has threatened a veto if SCHIP is expanded. The funding levels proposed by the president would not even allow SCHIP to cover as many children as it does now. So far, not all of New Mexico's congressional delegates have said they're on board with the expansion, and it's unclear whether Congress can muster the votes to override a veto.

"While Representative Heather Wilson is showing support for some aspects of SCHIP reauthorization, she has thus far been unwilling to commit to the full funding that the program needs," said Bill Jordan, Policy Director for NM Voices for Children, which supports full funding. "She and Senator Pete Domenici have a clear choice. Their vote will either show that they stand with New Mexico children who need health insurance, or that they stand with the president who insists on cutting health care for kids," Jordan added.

The First Focus poll also found that 66 percent of Americans are less likely to vote for their senator or congressman in the next election if they did not support legislation aimed at insuring more children. The First Focus press releases quotes pollster Luntz, who is also a long-time Republican strategist, as saying "It's clear that children will be front and center in 2008. Woe is the politician who ignores the next generation."

The Georgetown poll also showed bipartisan support, which included 75 percent of Republicans, for allowing low-income, uninsured working parents of children in SCHIP to be covered by the program when they do not have insurance through their job.

"President Bush is picking a fight over the wrong issue," said NM Voices Executive Director Eric Griego. "Because New Mexico's uninsured rate is so high, we have a lot at stake in this SCHIP reauthorization. We need Senator Domenici and Congresswoman Wilson to support the SCHIP bills moving through Congress and to override a presidential veto if necessary. If the president wants to support smaller government, he'd be much better off tackling corporate welfare than taking health care from kids," he added.

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.
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