

Do not veto the future, Mr. President

This past week, the U.S. House and Senate each passed their own versions of a bill to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The two bills now head to conference committee with the threat of a veto from the president.

These bills reauthorize and expand SCHIP to cover children in families having incomes of up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. In addition, the House bill preserves our seniors' access to doctors by preventing a proposed 10 percent cut in physician reimbursement for 2008. The additional federal expense from the proposals would be offset by a hike in excise tax on tobacco and the elimination of subsidies to private insurance companies in Medicare now reimbursed 12 percent more per beneficiary than the traditional Medicare program.

Congressmen, senators and the administration, who have opposed these bills saying they represent government-run health care should re-evaluate their positions and consider the following.

SCHIP is a government-financed but not government-run program. The care would continue to be provided by private doctors and hospitals.

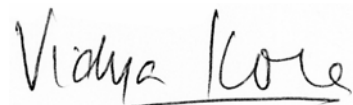
Those opposed to ending subsidies to Medicare HMOs should ask why HMOs should receive 12 percent more than the traditional program for little apparent additional benefit, while physicians in Medicare face cuts of 15 percent over the next two years.

If the privately financed system had met the needs of these children, why would we be having this discussion? We should not wait until the larger issues of health care reform are addressed and allow our children to grow up without coverage. SCHIP is a partnership between the federal government and states. And it has worked to provide health coverage to low-income children. The health and well-being of our children is the best asset we have and investing in it is the smart thing to do.

I urge Congress to finish work on the bills expeditiously and preserve health care access for our children and seniors. Legislation to safeguard these populations should be adopted unanimously and not subjected to the threat of presidential veto. The health of our children and seniors is too important to play politics.

The best policy for our nation involves working proactively to avoid crises. The tragedy of the Minneapolis bridge collapse – and examples like it – have lessons to teach. We cannot afford to neglect either the health of our infrastructure or the health of our children. We will experience serious consequences if we do.

America's children need to feel confident that their government works for them. On behalf of the more than 8,300 physician members of the Indiana State Medical Association, I urge Congress to pass SCHIP. And I urge you, Mr. President, please do not veto the future.



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