

# Poll Shows Overwhelming Support for Expanding SCHIP

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A new poll conducted for National Public Radio, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health shows that 70% of Americans support adding \$35 billion to the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) over the next five years, although a smaller majority of 64% favor overriding President Bush's veto of SCHIP legislation. The majority support is also bipartisan -- it is composed of 54% of Republicans as well as 69% of independents and 82% of Democrats.

What is especially fascinating in the poll is that the public finds White House arguments against expanding the program unpersuasive. After hearing arguments for and against (including opponents' claims "that the expansion would encourage some families who have private health insurance to drop it in favor of government-funded coverage" and "the expansion will wind up covering some children in middle-class families"), the support remains strong at 65%. Respondents are more worried that the SCHIP program won't cover enough children (54%) than are worried that SCHIP will provide health insurance to those who don't need it (33%). A slim majority (52%) reject the idea that SCHIP is a step toward government-run health care, but among the minority (40%) who think it is such a step, half of them say that is "mostly a good thing"!

The poll also shows that support for providing SCHIP coverage drops sharply when respondents are asked about children in families with incomes as high as \$80,000 for a family of four (down to 15%). This explains why President Bush and his supporters have been pushing this fallacy. There are no states whose SCHIP programs cover families at that level. New York asked for a waiver to do so and it was denied. An article in today's New York Times explains in detail why this argument is specious. Jocelyn A. Guyer, a researcher at the Health Policy Institute of Georgetown University, said: "This is a wildly contentious political issue, but it's largely a theoretical question. More than 99 percent of children in the program are below three times the poverty level, and New York is the only state that has expressed any interest in going to four times the poverty level."

Yesterday Ohio federal legislators Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Avon), Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-Cleveland), Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Niles), and Rep. Betty Sutton (D-Copley Township) held a press conference call to rally support for overriding the SCHIP veto in today's scheduled House vote. I have reported on the call in detail on Ohio Daily Blog. In that call, Brown and Tubbs Jones emphasized the bipartisan

nature of the original law and this expansion, and the successful and cost-effective nature of the SCHIP program to date. Ryan pointed out that insuring children is an economic as well as moral imperative:

"If we don't have all of our people healthy and active and on the field playing for us in this brutally competitive global economy, we are not going to have the kind of success that we expect ourselves to have as a country."

The comment that made my blood run cold, however, was when Sutton pointed out that this president says the country can expect to stay in Iraq for ten more years (at vastly greater expense than expanding SCHIP), and "the same children deprived of health care by Bush's veto might wind up fighting in Iraq within those ten years." As several of the legislators commented, and as retiring Rep. Dave Hobson (R-Springfield) said a week ago, this president is really out of touch.