

Washington, DC - Vermont's Congressional Delegation - Sen. Patrick Leahy (D), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I), and Rep. Peter Welch (D) - issued the following reaction to President Bush's veto of legislation renewing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The legislation protects insurance coverage for 6.6 million children currently enrolled in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and provides coverage for an additional 4 million children without insurance.

The bill overturns a pending Bush administration rule change that could threaten to cut coverage for hundreds of thousands of kids now covered under SCHIP. That change, announced in August, would tighten restrictions on states like Vermont that cover children above 250 percent of the federal poverty level and would mean more than 2,000 Vermont kids would lose their health coverage.

The bipartisan bill also reverses another Bush administration rule change announced this summer that would cost Vermont more than \$20 million each year by barring states like Vermont from using Medicaid funds for rehabilitation services for students with disabilities in kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The bill received overwhelming bipartisan support, passing the Senate 67-29 and the House 265-159.

Leahy said, "This veto starkly exposes the Bush Administration's muddled priorities. For President Bush to veto this children's health bill for cost reasons would be laughable if it were not so appalling. This is the same President who would commit the United States to borrow almost a trillion dollars to pay for a catastrophic war. To him, anything goes if it's spent in Iraq, but health insurance here at home for kids in families that are struggling is too much. Insurance coverage for 10 million children costs what we spend in Iraq in just 41 days."

Sanders said, "We are the only country in the industrialized world that does not provide health care for all people. The idea that Bush would veto this legislation to provide health care for children is beyond comprehension. He has hundreds of billions of dollars for tax breaks for the rich and to pay for the war in Iraq, but apparently he can't find the funding to provide health insurance for millions of children in families that need help."

Welch said, "President Bush has struck a new low today, demonstrating just how out of touch he is with the priorities working Vermonters. Making sure kids can go see a doctor when they

are sick is both inexpensive and the right thing to do. While 7 million more Americans have joined the ranks of the uninsured since President Bush took office, he seems intent on driving that number higher. I hope Republican members of Congress will finally stand up to this President on behalf of children and reject his inexcusable veto."