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KENNEDY, SMITH, ROCKEFELLER AND SNOWE FIGHT TO PROTECT OUR NATION'S CHILDREN

Work to prevent drastic restrictions Children's Health Insurance Program

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Senators Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), Gordon H. Smith (R-OR), Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), and Olympia J. Snowe (R-ME) released the following statements on the legislation introduced today that will prevent states from having to drastically restricting the number of children who can access care.

The bill specifically prohibits the implementation of rules put in place by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that would essentially prohibit states from providing quality health coverage to children whose family income is above 250% of the federal poverty level. This revokes that policy and would allow states to cover children at income levels that most appropriate for their state.

Senator Kennedy said, "Once again, the Bush Administration has shown itself to be out of touch and out of step with the priorities of working Americans. The Children's Health Insurance Program was passed to provide health coverage to all of our nation's children- not just those the Administration chooses. This bill allows states to continue to have the flexibility to make the right decision for their children and will help secure coverage for children across the country. Partisan politics have no place in safeguarding the health of our children and I urge the Administration to listen to the will of the American people, and to Congress, and to put the needs of our children first."

"This is a disappointing attempt by the Administration that would inhibit states' ability to cover more uninsured kids," said Senator Smith. "SCHIP is a valuable and life-saving program that gives America's children a chance at a healthy future. We will do all we can to try to block this policy and deliver a sensible SCHIP package to states."

"The President needs to know that we will not stand by and let his Administration pull the rug out from children and their families," Senator Rockefeller said. "Decisions about cost of living and what constitutes poverty should be left to the states who can best determine who can afford health insurance and who cannot. These decisions should not be made by the President who is clearly trying to use bureaucratic hurdles to block children from receiving necessary health care."

"Health coverage has grown so expensive that even above 250 percent of the Federal poverty line, many families simply cannot afford it. In my state of Maine, a family faced with purchasing a policy on the individual market could face a cost well in excess of \$24,000 a year," Senator Snowe said. "So it is no wonder that so many states are working to reach more children in families in which health care remains unaffordable. We in the Senate have achieved a bipartisan consensus to ensure continued progress to protect the health of every child. This legislation will rightfully block efforts to impose onerous and unreasonable restrictions on the states efforts to reach every child in need, and will focus us all on the essential task of completing the reauthorization of SCHIP."

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