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Republican senators support children's health insurance program

WASHINGTON — Sens. Chuck Grassley and Orrin Hatch said there is significant support among Republicans for bicameral legislation to reauthorize the children's health insurance program.

The Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act under consideration today maintains all of the key policy provisions of the bill passed by the Senate in August, including a cap on new spending of \$35 billion.

Grassley and Hatch helped to draft the legislation as Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Finance and Ranking Member of the Finance Subcommittee on Health Care. They said the support of so many leading Republican senators indicates the strength of the bill and the success of the SCHIP program.

Supporters said:

“It is critical that we not let SCHIP expire and that we extend the program to cover additional low-income children. I urge my Senate colleagues to approve this vital legislation by a veto-proof margin. This program simply cannot be allowed to expire,” said Sen. Susan Collins of Maine.

“While some may mistakenly characterize S-CHIP coverage as a welfare benefit, what they may not realize is that nearly 90 percent of uninsured children come from families where at least one parent is working. Today, fewer than half of parents in families earning less than \$40,000 a year are offered health insurance through their employer—a nine percent drop since 1997. S-CHIP has proved to be both a successful program and a saving grace for millions of American families who otherwise simply could not afford to pay for their children's health care. Compromise on both sides of the aisle helped us create this program ten years ago and hopefully a renewed sense of bipartisan commitment will help us successfully reauthorize this vital program today,” Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine.

“This bill marries good policy with good health care common-sense by funding a vital program for kids and discouraging smoking among our youth. We have found a workable solution to get coverage to those kids in need without over-extending the goals of the program. It would be irresponsible of the White House to veto this bill and deny millions of kids their chance at a healthy childhood,” said Sen. Gordon Smith of Oregon.

“I am proud to support this important bill, which will provide health insurance coverage to approximately 4 million more children who would otherwise be uninsured. I’m glad my colleagues and I were able to put politics aside and do what is right for these children,” said Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas.

“SCHIP is an important program to New Hampshire, providing health care coverage to thousands of lower-income children that would otherwise go uninsured. Months ago, I made a commitment to support reauthorization. I followed through by backing the Senate bill in August and will do so again when the final bill reaches the floor. House and Senate negotiators took the right step in rejecting drastic and unacceptable cuts to Medicare in the original House-passed legislation – a measure that would have jeopardized millions in funding to New Hampshire’s hospitals and nursing homes and would have all but eliminated the Medicare Advantage program that provides health care to more than 3,000 New Hampshire seniors,” said Sen. John Sununu of New Hampshire.

“New Mexico has a persistent problem with uninsured children. I helped create SCHIP as part of the 1997 Balanced Budget Act. My commitment to children’s health care remains firm today, and I believe this compromise SCHIP reauthorization bill should be enacted. The program has been a success. The number of children without health coverage has declined but the need for this program remains,” said Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico.

“The Children’s Health Insurance Program extends vital health care coverage to one of the most vulnerable segments of our population – low income children. Until we in Congress can agree on how to address the future of our nation’s health care policies, programs like the child health insurance program are needed to ensure that these children are not left out,” said Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

“This is about doing the right thing for families and ensuring access to health insurance for children who need it most. Passing an SCHIP bill is vital to Minnesota’s efforts to provide coverage for the state’s 80,000 uninsured children. This bill represents a sensible, bipartisan compromise, and I strongly encourage the President to sign it into law,” said Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota.

“We know that thousands of Alaska’s children have no health insurance. The passage of the SCHIP reauthorization bill is a first step in covering them. It ensures that one of our State’s most important programs – Denali KidCare – receives the necessary funds to deliver basic prevention and treatment services. Routine visits to doctors and dentists, substance abuse treatment, and essential prescription drugs can all be made available to our children and teens thanks to this funding,” said Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska.

““The CHIP program works for America’s children. Because of this legislation six million children are receiving the health care they need to become healthy, productive citizens. When something works we must do everything in our power to continue its success. The bill we voted on today is a good compromise that addresses viewpoints from both sides of the aisle in the Senate, and between the House and the Senate. If this bill passes and the President lets it stand, we can help four million more of our nation’s children. This is what it is all about –

helping those who cannot help themselves,” Hatch said.

“The legislation gets the children’s health insurance back on track by making states enroll low-income children and cutting off adult coverage. About half the new money is just to keep the program running for the kids already on it. The rest goes to enroll as many as 4 million new kids,” Grassley said.