

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 12, 2009

President-elect Barack Obama
Presidential Transition Office
Washington, DC 20270

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear President-elect Obama and Speaker Pelosi:

Thank you for expressing your desire to work with us to address the needs of the American people. We recognize that reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is an early legislative priority, and we hope that you will consider this legislation to be one of the first opportunities for bipartisan cooperation.

During the last Congress, significant efforts were made in an attempt to address concerns raised by House Republicans about how the underlying bills would impact uninsured children. Despite the progress that was made, there are still a few outstanding issues that we hope you agree should be addressed when we work to reauthorize the program this year:

Serving Eligible Low-income Children First

SCHIP is intended to serve those that are neediest first. As low-income families continue to face more economic insecurity, providing access to affordable health care coverage, regardless of any job change or displacement, should be our first priority. The legislation should demand success from the states in enrolling poor and low-income children below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, especially those who are currently eligible for Medicaid and/or SCHIP, but are not yet enrolled. Demanding success from the states could be as simple as requiring that states meet a threshold of enrollment before further expansions. Nearly all the states have demonstrated over the past year to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that meeting this standard is indeed possible.

Furthermore, in the current economic environment, several states have indicated that they will be experiencing shortfalls that could impact their ability to provide Medicaid benefits and services. Asking states to expand their SCHIP program before they are able to finance their existing Medicaid program would be a mistake. Expanding SCHIP to higher income families will only exacerbate the real access to care problem in the Medicaid program.

Citizenship Status

We believe that only U.S. citizens and certain legal residents should be permitted to benefit from a program like SCHIP. We also think it is fair to say that both parties believe that our immigration system is broken. That is why it is so important that the legislation include stronger provisions to prevent fraud by

including citizenship verification standards to ensure that only eligible U.S. citizens and certain legal residents are enrolled in the program.

Protecting Private Insurance Options

We agree that those with private coverage should not be forced into a government-run plan. SCHIP legislation should focus expansion efforts on children who are currently uninsured instead of moving children who have private health insurance options into government-run health insurance. Moving a child from private health insurance to government-run health insurance should not be part of your stated goal of providing SCHIP for 10 million children, a number we assume to be targeted towards low-income uninsured children.

Stable Funding Source

In order to guarantee access to the program and long term stability, SCHIP should be funded through a stable funding source, not budget gimmicks. Further, the legislation should not include extraneous provisions unrelated to SCHIP that limit patient choice or prohibit access to quality medical care. Our nation's Governors need a stable SCHIP program so they may properly budget. Every American faces the crushing burden of a declining economy. This should not be a time Congress raises taxes, especially on the poorest Americans, to finance program expansions as part of the SCHIP reauthorization bill.

We believe these to be critical elements to improve this vital program that if fully incorporated would dramatically increase bipartisan support for the legislation. Thank you for the consideration of this request. We look forward hearing from you and working with you towards a bipartisan agreement.

Sincerely,

John Boehner

Joe Barton

Nathan Deal

Paul Ryan

Eric Cantor

Jane Cunningham

Kit Culley

Shamir Fera

John Shadyg
Walter B. Jones

Harsha Blackburn
Tom Cooney

Les Mills
W. Rausony A.
Tom Gilbert

Lulu Spier

Phil Sengren

Jeff D... KY-4

John Sullivan OR-7

~~Ray Blunt~~

De 12

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Bob B... FE-09

Eds... UT-1

Fay Grange

Ken Bondy

Tom B...

Hal Rogers

John Klein

Frank... AZ-2

Edi Smith NE-3

Bill Shuster PA-9

Ernie Sessing TX-32

Wally Hanger

Red... TX-2

Mark... NE-3

Jeff... IL-19

Breg Walden

Sam Johnson

Nichole Pachmann

Paul Bass

Paul Lambert

Andre Bentan

Fred Galt

Tom Wilson

R.P. Overmyer Jr

Devin Newer

Dean Thompson

Franklin

Tommy (mi)

John Callaway

Cynthia P. Lummis, Digo.

Howard Webb

Robert J. Wittman VA-01

OK-51 Mary Fuller

Sam Lee OK-4

Eliza

K. yhl by TX-01

Gladys Hales

Patt J. T. D.

Jean H. Schmidt

Bob Mollatto

Steve Scalise, LA-1

Jerry Lewis

Virginia Fox

Donald A. Manzullo

Jack Kingston

Lynell G. G. G.

Sue Mepick

James Boehm

J. Jordan

John Gansling

TX 26

John G. King MD

Scott Dreni

Steve King

Jim Hill FL-01

Judy Biggs

Jo L Henry

Ann Hill

John Boozman

Ginny Brown-Water

Brett Gilman

Mike Colan

Robert B. Anderson

Carl ~~Walt~~

Jeff ~~Walt~~

Art

Bill Canard

Steve Christ

Bob

Lynn Jenkins

Jim Furman

Pete Olson

T. Ken ~~Walt~~

Steve Sealise

Henry B. B.

~~Patricia~~

Lamar Smith

Patricia Hopkins

Todd R. Platts

~~Constance~~

Gregg Palmer

Bro. Ruffin

Joe D. D.

Bonnie

Steve Byrnes

Ralph M. Hall

~~Steve~~

Cliff Seamus

Yvonne

Pat

Ed Whitford

Catholic Morris Rodgers

Edgar H. Futre

Jim Clark

Bro Inglis

John H. Hester

Zach Wamp

Ann Shook

Wesley Rose

Mary Bern Mack

John McHugh