

Recently, Congress has been debating a proposal to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) by \$35 billion. President Bush vetoed this bill, and I want to explain why I voted to sustain his veto.

Like every American, I am concerned that rising health care costs are a growing burden for many middle-income families. However, I believe there are better solutions than increasing government control over health care, which is what the current SCHIP bill would do, at the expense of personal choice. Members of Congress and federal employees can choose from a variety of competitive health plans. We should work toward creating the same opportunity for all Americans.

SCHIP, known as Healthy Families in California, provides health insurance to children in families living above the poverty line who are unable to afford private coverage. I supported the creation of SCHIP in 1997, and I support extending this successful program today. Indeed, I am a cosponsor of a bill to extend SCHIP for 18 months and provide states with additional funding to cover shortfalls while Congress works on a long-term solution that truly addresses the needs of low-income children.

However, the current dispute in Congress is over whether SCHIP should be *expanded* to pay for health care for children from families making more than \$60,000 per year. Many of these children already have health coverage, while in California alone, more than 800,000 kids in low-income families -- the original target population for SCHIP -- have no health insurance. We should be providing some limited extra funds to get the neediest children covered first. Instead, the Democrats' bill would expand the program to higher-income families and relax documentation requirements for Medi-Cal and SCHIP, making it easier for non-citizens and illegal aliens to fraudulently obtain benefits.

Far too often Congress throws money at a problem without addressing the root causes of that problem. But if we are serious about addressing health care affordability for working families, we need to do more than raises taxes and cover more people through government health care. Congress should instead pursue reforms aimed at making health care more affordable for working families.

To that end, I recently joined Congressman Ron Kind of Wisconsin in introducing bipartisan

legislation to eliminate a 15.3% federal tax on health insurance premiums for nearly 3 million self-employed Californians. I also support a tax credit for health insurance that would allow 10.5 million kids from families above the SCHIP eligibility limit to keep or gain health coverage. I believe these and similar reforms, coupled with an SCHIP extension that reaffirms the program's actual intent on truly needy children, are the most effective way to improve and expand access to high-quality health care for all Americans.