

*President Obama expected to sign SCHIP bill later this afternoon*

WASHINGTON, DC - Rep. Peter Welch supported and the House passed a bill Wednesday that would provide health care coverage to 11 million children.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) Reauthorization bill will expand coverage to 4 million uninsured children and will allow states to continue covering 7 million children who already have health insurance.

The House passed a version of SCHIP Jan. 14. The Senate then amended the bill, and the House passed the new version today on a vote of 290-135. President Obama is expected to sign the bill later this afternoon.

The bill also provides resources for Vermont and other states to reach out to children who are eligible for SCHIP and Medicaid coverage but who are not already enrolled. Additionally, the bill provides quality dental care to children and ensures that mental health services are covered at the same level as medical services.

During the past two years Congress passed SCHIP twice, but both times it was vetoed by President Bush. President-elect Obama has committed to signing the bill once it is approved by the Senate.

"Today's vote signals the start of a new day in America. By providing health insurance to an additional 4 million children, we are demonstrating our commitment to finding practical solutions to an unacceptable problem," Welch said. "This is just a first step to providing quality health care to all Americans, but it is a vital first step. Today's actions make clear to the American people that this new Congress and new president are ready to move our country forward."