

*Leahy, Sanders, Welch Announce Breakthrough That Would Rescue More Than 2000 Vermont Children Who Face Insurance Cutoffs Under Bush Plan, While Covering Thousands More Under Dr. Dynasaur*

Washington, DC - Congress is on the verge of passing a major children's health bill that will protect insurance coverage for kids currently enrolled in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and provides new funding to cover millions of kids without insurance. The Vermont Congressional Delegation - Sen. Patrick Leahy (D), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I), and Rep. Peter Welch (D) - announced Tuesday that the bill would save health insurance for more than 2000 Vermont children who now are about to lose coverage under new rules announced by the Bush Administration, while enabling coverage of thousands more Vermont kids.

The House and Senate are expected to approve the bipartisan SCHIP bill in final votes this week. President Bush has threatened a veto.

Using SCHIP funds, Vermont's Dr. Dynasaur program now offers comprehensive health coverage to children from households with incomes up to 300 percent of poverty -- \$61,950 for a family of four. Eleven other states also offer coverage to kids from middle-income families. The legislation will cover an additional 4 million children nationwide - several thousand more in Vermont -- on top of the 6 million currently in the program. It will also sideline a pending Bush Administration rule change, announced Aug. 17, that threatens to cut coverage for millions of kids now covered under SCHIP. That change would tighten restrictions on states like Vermont that cover children above 250 percent of the federal poverty level. In Vermont, the new rules would mean more than 2000 kids would lose their health coverage.

The bipartisan bill also fends off another sudden Bush Administration change announced this summer that would cost Vermont more than \$20 million each year, by barring states like Vermont from using Medicaid funds for rehabilitation services for students with disabilities in kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The Vermont Delegation opposes the rules change, and Leahy and Sanders helped convince Senate leaders to include a six-month moratorium in the bill.

Leahy said, "We can make sure that ten million children have health insurance for what the Bush Administration spends in Iraq in just 41 days. But instead of helping more families that are

struggling, the President would cut thousands in Vermont who have coverage right now. He is failing to lead, so Congress again is stepping in to realign our priorities."

Sanders said, "We are not only stopping President Bush from reducing coverage for more than 2,000 Vermont children, we are adding more kids to the program all over the country. We also are moving closer to the day when all of our children have health insurance. The President's threat to veto this bill is incomprehensible."

Welch said, "Vermont has shown the nation that providing health care to kids is inexpensive and the right thing to do. This legislation eliminates the Bush Administration's road block to Vermont's successful Dr. Dynasaur program and gives millions of working parents across the country the peace of mind that comes with knowing their child can see a doctor when he or she is sick. I am hopeful that Congress will approve this bill with a strong enough majority that sends a clear message to President Bush: Don't mess with health care for kids."