

# Floor Statement of the Honorable John D. Dingell on Introduction of the Children's Health First Act

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

## INTRODUCTION OF THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH FIRST ACT March 15, 2007

We are here because we need to provide affordable healthcare options for children. There are nine million children uninsured in the United States today. There is no excuse for a country that is spending \$1.9 trillion on health care to have even one uninsured child, especially when it costs a mere \$3.50 a day to cover a child.

Who are these children? Nearly two thirds are low income children and more than half are children in working families. Moreover, over half are minorities. But most importantly, these are children that are significantly less likely to make it to a doctor when they have an acute earache or even recurrent asthma and even die.

I am introducing the Children's Health First Act with Reps. Diana DeGette, Frank Pallone, Henry Waxman, and others, to provide every child in this country access to affordable health insurance. Senator Clinton is introducing the companion bill in the Senate as well.

This bill builds on successful public programs such as the State Children's Health Insurance Program by offering States financial support to expand coverage up to working families making approximately \$70,000 a year.

This bill allows employers and families to access good health insurance by buying into an affordable insurance pool. And the bill even goes further by allowing States to help employers retain coverage they already have through a 50 percent subsidy of the cost the States are spending on coverage for a child.

This bill provides States with new tools to help them find and enroll qualified children and ensure benefits and services are available once the children are enrolled. The tools include things such as allowing States to enroll children in schools and hospitals in public programs, allowing States to simplify their applications and renewal forms, and allowing children to enroll in coverage for a full year, as in most private plans.

The bill also makes numerous other improvements to Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. This bill allows States to expand coverage to legal immigrants, young adults up to age 25, and offers incentives for States to cover pregnant women.

Health care is every person's problem. It costs our country to have parents staying home to care for sick children, for the insured to pay higher premiums, for hospitals to provide uncompensated care, and for us to have a unhealthy younger generation.

We cannot continue to ignore a problem as large as 46 million uninsured people and certainly not the nine million vulnerable uninsured children. To cover all children, it will cost us a fraction of what it cost to provide prescription drugs to seniors. I think it is time we agreed to make that investment for our future.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce  
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