

Chairman Dingell, Subcommittee on Health hearing entitled, "Covering Uninsured Kids: Missed Opportunities for Moving Forward"

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH HEARING ENTITLED, "COVERING UNINSURED KIDS: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOVING FORWARD"
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I am pleased that there are two distinguished panels of witnesses to discuss missed opportunities for providing health care to America's children.

Certainly the most obvious missed opportunities are the Administration's two vetoes of our efforts to reauthorize and expand the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Many States lack the money to cover their children under the existing program. The bills passed by Congress would have averted these likely funding shortfalls, expected to affect some 42 States by 2012.

Last year's CHIP reauthorization also made great strides in the area of children's dental and mental health, as well as in quality measurement and improvement. With the President's veto we lost this as well.

Most importantly, the bill went right to the heart of finding and enrolling uninsured but eligible children through financial incentives for States and new tools, such as express lane eligibility, to streamline enrollment paperwork.

This Administration leaves behind a sad legacy on children's health.

If preventing health coverage for 10 million additional children isn't bad enough, the Administration has proposed to cut more than \$12 billion from the Medicaid program over the next 5 years.

We can also thank the Bush Administration for the now-infamous "August 17 guidance," which is being used to derail State plans to cover uninsured children. With little regard for the well-being of poor children in America, the Administration would prohibit a child's enrollment in CHIP for a full year after the date the child's parent loses employer-sponsored coverage.

That is a full year of immunizations, well-child visits, ear aches, strep throat, dental care, and other needs that will go untreated.

Our Nation has record numbers of Americans who are uninsured and, millions more who are under-insured. Nearly 1 in 4 families under the age of 65 will spend more than 10 percent of their pre-tax income on healthcare in 2008. With the pending recession, programs such as CHIP and Medicaid take on heightened importance. As we all know, health

coverage is often an early casualty of a parent who is laid off, and children should not be the ones who suffer as a result.

States need the ability to keep these vital programs strong especially in times of economic downturn and we should be seeking ways in addition to CHIP that provide State assistance in the form of increased Federal funding of Medicaid. States also need the ability to ramp up these programs to help working Americans whose incomes are not keeping pace with health costs. We should not have any more missed opportunities for this country or its children.

I thank today's witnesses for joining us, and in particular Ms. Taylor-Chester for sharing her very compelling story of her son's experience with CHIP.

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515