

WASHINGTON (Thursday, September 20) - Vermont's Congressional Delegation - Sen. Patrick Leahy (D), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I), and Rep. Peter Welch (D) - issued the following comments in response to President Bush's news conference statement today that he will veto the conference report renewing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The expiration of the program could cause millions of children to lose their health insurance.

Leahy said, "The Bush Administration's priorities are way off the tracks, and their plans for the SCHIP Program would hurt children and families in Vermont and across the country. Few issues crystallize their warped priorities more clearly than the contrast of this threat to veto health insurance for children at the very moment the White House is asking for more than \$100 billion more for the war in Iraq. This veto threat flies in the face of Congress's bipartisan work to pass a carefully crafted plan to cover more uninsured children. It is sad that basic health care for children is even an issue in the richest nation on earth. I hope the President will reconsider before it's too late for those who his veto would hurt the most."

Sanders said, "This veto threat is a disgrace. It's also a disgrace that in the richest nation on the planet, more than nine million children are uninsured. Instead of providing health insurance for all children, Bush wants to take coverage away from more than 2,000 kids in Vermont and more than four million nationwide. If Bush wants a fight, so be it. If he wants to take sides with private insurance companies instead of children, so be it. This is a fight we can win and must win."

Welch said, "President Bush continues to demonstrate morally misguided and completely out of touch priorities in his disregard for the health care of America's children. The President likes to refer to himself as "The Decider." This is clearly the wrong decision for the health of our children, wrong for working families, and wrong for the states. I urge Republican members of Congress to finally stand up to this President on behalf of the well-being of our kids."