

Override this veto

by The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said this week that President Bush's veto of a bipartisan bill to dramatically expand children's health insurance clearly shows "how detached President Bush is from the priorities of the American people."

Normally, one might dismiss the comments of the Nevada Democrat as partisan rhetoric. But Reid is right. Even many Republicans in Congress believe the veto shows that the president, who rarely vetoes legislation, doesn't fully grasp how concerned Americans are about health care.

The bill would have expanded federal spending for the widely praised State Children's Health Insurance Program by \$35 billion over five years. That would have allowed states to cover an additional 3.8 million children; about 6 million children are currently covered. As Rep. Ron Kind, D-Wis., notes, these are children from working families "that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to afford private insurance."

The reauthorization measure would have allowed Wisconsin to keep its successful BadgerCare program intact and also enable the state to enroll even more children from uninsured working families by leveraging more federal dollars.

Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., says the bill is fiscally irresponsible and uses what he calls "a spending gimmick" to understate the true long-term costs. The president, who has proposed only a \$5 billion increase in SCHIP, says he's willing to work out a compromise "if they need a little more money."

But "a little more money" won't meet the need. Besides, as Kind points out, the expansion would be largely financed by a 61-cent increase in the federal cigarette tax, which, in turn, would discourage kids from smoking. Kind also points out that the bill is the product of a "wide bipartisan compromise," the very thing that voters are legitimately clamoring for to deal with the nation's problems. Significantly, a number of Republicans - including Sens. Charles Grassley of Iowa and Orrin Hatch of Utah, normally a strong supporter of Bush - are pushing for an override. The Republicans who believe that the president is just dead wrong on this issue must work to convince others in their party that for the good of the nation and its children they must work with Democrats to override the veto.

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