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**REMARKS OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH
INSURANCE PROGRAM**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Many of the best ideas in public policy are the simplest. The Children's Health Insurance Program is based on one simple and powerful idea – that all children deserve a healthy start in life, and that no parents should have to worry about whether they can afford to take their child to the doctor when the child is sick. CHIP can make the difference between a child starting life burdened with disease – or a child who is healthy and ready to learn and grow.

The enactment of Medicaid in 1965 brought decent health care to families living in poverty, including children. But it became clearer and clearer as the years and the decades passed, that more and more children were unable to obtain health care because they lived in families whose incomes were too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford health insurance.

Finally, in Massachusetts, in the 1990's we agreed that health care coverage for children is a necessity and that action needed to be taken. John McDonough, Executive Director of Health Care for All in Massachusetts, deserves much of the credit for what came next. His pioneering work while he was in the Massachusetts Legislature on children's health care led to the passage in 1993 of the state's Children's Medical Security Plan, which guaranteed quality health care to children in families ineligible for Medicaid and unable to afford health insurance.

A year later, Massachusetts expanded eligibility for Medicaid, and financed the expansion through a tobacco tax – the same approach we used successfully a few years later for CHIP and the same approach that is proposed in the bill before us now.

Rhode Island and other states took similar action, and helped create a nationwide demand for action by Congress to address the unmet needs of vast numbers of children for good health care.

In 1997, Congress acted on that call, and the result was CHIP. Senator Hatch and I worked together then—as we have this year—to focus on guaranteeing health care to children who need it. Now, in every state in America and in Puerto Rico, CHIP covers the services that give children a healthier start in life – well child care, vaccinations, doctor visits, emergency services, and many others.

In its first year 1997, CHIP enrolled nearly a million children, and enrollment has grown ever since. An average of 4 million are now covered each month, and 6 million are enrolled each year.

As a result, in the past decade, the percentage of uninsured children has dropped from almost 23 percent in 1997 to 14 percent today. That reduction is significant, but it's obviously far from enough.

CHIP improves the overall quality of life for children fortunate enough to have its coverage, by allowing them to get the care they need when they need it. They're more likely to have a real doctor and a real place to obtain care, and, their parents don't delay seeking care when their child needs it. Children on CHIP also have significantly more access to preventive care.

Studies also show that CHIP helps to improve children's school performance. When children are receiving the health care they need, they do better academically, emotionally, physically

and socially. CHIP helps create children who will be better prepared to contribute to America.

And CHIP all but eliminates the distressing racial and ethnic health disparities for the minority children who disproportionately depend on it for their coverage.

CHIP's success is even more impressive and important when we realize that more and more adults are losing their own insurance coverage, because employers reduce it or drop it entirely.

That's why organizations representing children, or the health care professionals who serve them, agree that preserving and strengthening CHIP is essential to children's health. The American Academy of Pediatrics, First Focus, the American Medical Association, the National Association of Children's Hospitals and countless other organizations dedicated to children all strongly support CHIP.

A statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics puts it this way--"Enrollment in SCHIP is associated with improved access, continuity, and quality of care, and a reduction in racial/ethnic disparities. As pediatricians, we see what happens when children don't receive necessary health care services such as immunizations and well-child visits. Their overall health suffers and expensive emergency room visits increase."

Today, we are here to dedicate ourselves to carrying on the job begun by Congress ten years ago, and to make sure that the lifeline of CHIP is strengthened and extended to many more children.

Millions of children now eligible for CHIP or Medicaid are not enrolled in these programs. Of the nine million uninsured children, over two-thirds—more than 6 million – are already eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. These programs are there to help them, but these children are not receiving that help either because their parents don't know about the programs, or because of needless barriers to enrollment.

Think about that number—9 million children in the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth. 9 million children whose only family doctor is the hospital emergency room. 9 million children at risk of blighted lives and early death because of illnesses that could easily be treated if they have a regular source of medical care.

9 million uninsured children in America isn't just wrong—it's outrageous, and we need to change it as soon as possible.

We know where the Bush Administration stands. The President's proposal for CHIP doesn't provide what's needed to cover children who are eligible but unenrolled. In fact, the President's proposal is \$8 billion less than what's needed simply to keep children now enrolled in CHIP from losing their current coverage—\$8 billion short. To make matters worse, the President has threatened to veto the Senate bill, which does the job that needs to be done if we're serious about guaranteeing decent health care to children of working families across America.

We can't rely on the Administration to do what is needed. We in Congress have to step up to the plate and renew our commitment to CHIP.

That's why I'm supporting the CHIP bill before us. It is a genuine bipartisan compromise, and I commend Senator Baucus, Senator Grassley, Senator Rockefeller and Senator Hatch for their dedication to making sure that more of America's children have a start at a healthy life.

This bill provides coverage to 4 million children who would otherwise be uninsured.

It adjusts the financing structure of CHIP so that states that are covering their children aren't forced to scramble for additional funds from year to year, and, so that Congress doesn't have to pass a new band-aid every year to stop the persistent bleeding under the current program.

Importantly, this bill will not allow states to keep their CHIP funds if they aren't doing something to actually cover children.

Equally important, this bill allows each state to cover children at income levels that make sense for their state.

The bill also supports quality improvement and better outreach and enrollment efforts for the program. It's a scandal that 6 million children today who are eligible for the program are not enrolled in it.

In sum, this bill moves us forward together, Republicans and Democrats alike, to guarantee the children of America the health care they need and deserve.

Our priority should be not merely to hold on to the gains of the past, but to see that all children have an access to decent coverage. Families with greater means should pay a fair share of the coverage. But every parent in America should have the opportunity to meet the health care needs of their children.

Quality health for children isn't just an interesting option or a nice idea. It's not just something we wish we could do. It's an obligation. It's something we have to do. And it's something we can do today. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make sure this very important legislation is enacted.

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