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**CONTACT:** Melissa Wagoner  
(202) 224-2633

**KENNEDY RESPONDS TO SECRETARY LEAVITT ON CHIP**

WASHINGTON, DC— Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, released the following statement in response to President Bush's and Secretary Leavitt's criticism of the Children's Health Insurance Program. The CHIP legislation is fiscally responsible and does not add to the budget deficit, paying for the cost of children's health coverage through an increased tax on tobacco. Study after study has shown that increasing the cost of cigarettes reduces smoking, especially among children and teens. The bill thus has a double benefit: it increases coverage for children, and decreases the staggering toll of illness and death caused by youth smoking.

Senator Kennedy said, "Today, President Bush and Health Secretary Leavitt made abundantly clear that they intend to place children of working families in double jeopardy when it comes to their health. Not only will the President deny health care to children, but he'll also do nothing to keep them from smoking. How does Congress negotiate when the President repeatedly says no to respectable bipartisan options to truly protect our children?"

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