



Sinking SCHIP: A Defining Moment

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On Thursday, the House of Representatives will vote on a measure to override President Bush's veto of a massive government-subsidized health insurance entitlement expansion plan. I agree with the Democrats on one thing: This is indeed a "defining moment."

The left-wing elite is in high dudgeon over conservatives who have dared to question the wisdom of extending the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to middle-class families, adults and even illegal aliens to the tune of \$35 billion — funding dependent on saddling millions of smokers with regressive taxes and maintaining their nicotine addictions.

Liberal columnists E.J. Dionne and Paul Krugman decried Rush Limbaugh, Mark Steyn and other opponents as "meanies and hypocrites" who are "slimming" children. Class-

less comedienne and "View" television show co-host Joy Behar took to the airwaves to condemn me as a "selfish b— —" for challenging Harry Reid's use of an SCHIP expansion poster family, the Frosts of Baltimore, last week. Cable TV Bush-basher Keith Olbermann paraded the Frost parents on television and coaxed them into displaying photos of their children in their hospital beds after a horrible car accident while they castigated conservatives for "distraction" techniques. Never mind that the president's veto does not affect families like the Frosts covered by existing policies.

But here's what the hysterical tantrum-throwers really don't want to reckon with: The Frost parents' status as two property-owning, three vehicle-driving, "intermittent" and "part-time" workers raises fundamental policy questions about which families should benefit from

government-subsidized health insurance in the first place – and whether even better-off families than the Frosts should be added to the public health insurance dole.

Did you know that the vast majority of SCHIP programs currently in place do not have assets tests? What if I told you I drove a Volvo SUV, a Chevrolet Suburban, and a Ford F250 Pickup work truck? What if I told you, further, that I owned a large home and commercial property worth at least \$400,000 in total – property for which I paid a total of \$215,000? What if I told you, in addition, that I was resourceful enough to cobble together financing (through scholarships and other means) for private school education for four children? What if I told you that neither I nor my spouse was employed full time? Would you consider my family "exactly the kind" and "precisely the type" of family that should benefit from SCHIP – which was intended for the "working poor," but has become the nose of the middle-class entitlement camel in the nation's health care tent?

That's what Harry Reid and his socialized health care minions are telling us.

And now they demand that we shut up lest we be accused of "Swiftboating" innocent children.

Are Democrats capable of defending their reckless, inequitable agenda without tot-sized human shields? Apparently not. In advance of the override vote, they simply switched

flak jackets and brought out a 2-year-old child with a heart defect, Bethany Wilkerson of Florida, to lobby for the override. But like the Frost children, little Bethany would have been covered regardless of the entitlement expansion veto.

The Democrats may believe their Romper Room politics are working. And some queasy Republicans may be tempted to abandon fiscal conservatism for electoral expediency. But a majority of Americans polled by USA Today/Gallup this week – 52 percent – agree with President Bush that most benefits should go to children in families earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level – about \$41,000 for a family of four. The polls showed that "only 40 percent say benefits should go to families earning up to \$62,000, as the bill written by Democrats and some Republicans would allow."

Defining moment indeed: Who represents the truly needy? Who represents responsible taxpayers? Who represents future generations, who would be forced to send their hard-earned money to fund this hugetastic middle-class entitlement explosion? The GOP is already responsible for passing the obscene Medicare prescription drug entitlement expansion – the largest in the program's history and the true costs of which were suppressed until after it became law.

If Republicans don't have the guts to torpedo the Democrats' SCHIP Trojan Horse permanently, they deserve to lose their seats.

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