

Altmire Calls for Expanding Health Coverage for America's Children

(Washington, DC) - This week during "Cover the Uninsured Week," Rep. Jason Altmire (PA-4) called on Congress to expand the health coverage of America's children and to reauthorize the landmark State Children's Health Insurance Program.

"Currently, more than 9 million children, or one out of every eight children, are without health insurance in the United States," said Rep. Altmire. "The lack of health insurance coverage for children makes it difficult for them to access essential health care services, including basic immunizations, prescriptions and annual well-visits. In a country as wealthy as ours, this is a national disgrace."

"Without the State Children's Health Insurance Program, this alarming statistic would be much higher," Rep. Altmire pointed out.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program - or "SCHIP" - was established by Congress in 1997 to expand health care coverage for children. It provides matching funds to states to help them provide health care for children living in families that are earning too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to afford private insurance. Since it was created in 1997, SCHIP has been a successful, cost-effective program. Currently, more than 6 million children are enrolled in SCHIP nationwide.

"To help address the number of uninsured children, I voted for the House FY 2008 budget which passed on March 29 and included a \$50 billion reserve fund to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program," stated Rep. Altmire. "This funding combined with the reauthorization of the program will go a long way toward reducing the over 280,000 children in Pennsylvania currently without health insurance."

In a given year, children without health insurance are twice as likely not to receive any medical care as children with health care coverage. In addition, more than one in three uninsured children do not have a personal doctor or nurse; this statistic is significantly higher than the rate for children with health care coverage (13.5%).

"Pennsylvania has been a leader in its implementation and management of SCHIP. To continue its success, Congress must step up to the plate to ensure current coverage levels are maintained and the program is able to expand," added Rep. Altmire.

"Children who have health insurance are better prepared to learn in school and better equipped to succeed in life," concluded Rep. Altmire. "I believe expanding health care coverage for America's children is the number one issue facing children's health care needs this year, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to address it."