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Statement by Senator John D. (Jay) Rockefeller, Ranking Member,
Senate Health Care Subcommittee
“CHIP at 10: A Decade of Covering Children”
(as prepared)
July 25, 2006

“I am pleased that we are here today to begin discussions on reauthorizing the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Next year will mark a decade of outstanding success for this landmark program. We must now ensure that CHIP and its benefits continue. Healthy children are more likely to become healthy adults. And health care dollars spent during childhood save many times over in health care spending during that child’s life. So while we review our successes let us also keep an eye on long-term benefits.

“When we began this effort in 1997, there were over 10 million uninsured children in this country. The failed Clinton health reform initiative left us concerned that our children would not receive access to basic health care. Out of this came a bipartisan commitment to ensure the health of these children. My good friend and colleague, the late Senator John Chaffee, and Congressman John Dingell joined me in getting the ball rolling by introducing the Children's Health Insurance Provides Security Act of 1997. Putting that bill together was a monumental task. In the end, we came away with a cost-effective program to protect children’s health.

“CHIP was an immediate success. Over its almost 10-year history, more than 6 million children have enrolled and received benefits.

“Furthermore, it provided states the flexibility to expand their programs - a challenge that many enthusiastically met. A notable example is the willingness of many states to cover pre- and post-natal care to low-income, pregnant women. This helps ensure that these women deliver healthy babies into this world. What better good can we provide than giving a new life the best chance at a healthy start?

“So now, here we are, with the task of determining ways to maintain the broad-based coverage offered through CHIP, while keeping the costs manageable and providing access for even more Americans.

“There is no question in my mind that reauthorization must not reduce the coverage provided under CHIP. We must not step backwards. States should be allowed to continue their ability to expand benefits as long as they have adequate funds to match federal contributions, while not jeopardizing any of the services guaranteed to the basic CHIP population.

“I am disturbed by rumors -- and rumors I hope have no legitimate basis -- that some of my colleagues would suggest that we end or cut back on CHIP. That, in my judgment, would be precisely the wrong approach. It would place the health of our

nation's children in jeopardy. I will fight any such attempt. We should all work together to maintain all of the good this program has brought to our nation.

“Over the coming months, we will again engage in considerable discussion, debate, and negotiation about CHIP. In the end, however, we must continue to ensure access to health care for low-income Americans and provide peace of mind to their families. To do otherwise, would be a mistake.

“Let me be clear about my position. I am as convinced as I was in 1997 - and, in fact, long before that - that having uninsured children in America is not acceptable. More than 8.4 million of our children still lack health coverage. Almost 70% of these children are eligible for Medicaid and CHIP. We must find ways to enroll them in the programs that work.

“But we cannot ignore the other 2.5 million children without any access to health insurance. With the rising costs of health care and health insurance, and as more employers cut back employee benefits, these numbers will certainly rise. We must find a way to expand CHIP to cover their health as well.

“In 1997 I made a promise to provide access to health care for the uninsured children of this country. I come before you today to reaffirm that promise. And I genuinely look forward to working with my colleagues on the Committee to do just that. CHIP was one of this Committee's finest moments - an accomplishment we can all feel proud of when we leave this place. I believe it is what we were sent here to do. Let's give the people we represent a reason to be proud once again.”