

Statement on Signing the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007

December 12, 2007

Today I signed into law the “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007,” a bill to reauthorize Head Start. Over the past 40 years, Head Start has provided comprehensive child development services to more than 20 million low-income children and their families to promote school readiness. Because of the National Reporting System, we know that more Head Start programs are helping children gain early reading and math skills. But we must take steps to improve Head Start to ensure that low-income children arrive at school ready to learn.

I am pleased that this bill addresses several longstanding administration priorities, such as increased competition among Head Start providers, improved coordination of early childhood delivery systems, and stronger educational performance standards. Increasing competition for providers will help ensure that we offer the highest quality programs to our Nation’s most vulnerable young children. Greater collaboration among Head Start agencies, schools, and other programs serving young children will help ensure our investments are better aligned and more effective. Stronger educational performance standards and an emphasis on research-based curricula and

classroom practices will increase children’s preparedness for school. I also support the bill’s provisions to strengthen fiscal accountability and program oversight, so that dollars intended to serve children are spent wisely.

I am, however, deeply disappointed that the bill ends the National Reporting System, our only tool to examine consistently how Head Start children are performing in programs across the Nation. We should be working to provide more and better data to parents, teachers, and policymakers, not less. I am concerned that the bill authorizes spending levels higher than those proposed in my budget. Approval of this legislation is not an endorsement of these funding levels or a commitment to request them. I am also disappointed that the bill fails to include my proposal to protect faith-based organizations’ religious hiring autonomy.

I thank Members of both parties in Congress who worked on this legislation. I will continue to work with Congress to ensure that our neediest children are prepared for success in school and a lifetime of achievement.

NOTE: H.R. 1429, approved December 12, was assigned Public Law No. 110–134.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the “Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2007”

December 12, 2007

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 3963, the “Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2007.” Like its predecessor, H.R. 976, this bill does not put poor children first and

it moves our country’s health care system in the wrong direction. Ultimately, our Nation’s goal should be to move children who have no health insurance to private coverage—not to move children who already

have private health insurance to government coverage. As a result, I cannot sign this legislation.

The purpose of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was to help low-income children whose families were struggling, but did not qualify for Medicaid, to get the health care coverage that they needed. My Administration strongly supports reauthorization of SCHIP. That is why in February of this year I proposed a 5-year reauthorization of SCHIP and a 20 percent increase in funding for the program.

Some in the Congress have sought to spend more on SCHIP than my budget proposal. In response, I told the Congress that I was willing to work with its leadership to find any additional funds necessary to put poor children first, without raising taxes.

The leadership in the Congress has refused to meet with my Administration's representatives. Although they claim to have made "substantial changes" to the legislation, H.R. 3963 is essentially identical to the legislation that I vetoed in October. The legislation would still shift SCHIP away from its original purpose by covering adults. It would still include coverage of

many individuals with incomes higher than the median income in the United States. It would still result in government health care for approximately 2 million children who already have private health care coverage. The new bill, like the old bill, does not responsibly offset its new and unnecessary spending, and it still raises taxes on working Americans.

Because the Congress has chosen to send me an essentially identical bill that has the same problems as the flawed bill I previously vetoed, I must veto this legislation, too. I continue to stand ready to work with the leaders of the Congress, on a bipartisan basis, to reauthorize the SCHIP program in a way that puts poor children first; moves adults out of a program meant for children; and does not abandon the bipartisan tradition that marked the original enactment of the SCHIP program. In the interim, I call on the Congress to extend funding under the current program to ensure no disruption of services to needy children.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
December 12, 2007.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Umaru Yar'Adua of Nigeria December 13, 2007

President Bush. Mr. President, it's been my honor to welcome you here to the White House. Now, we've just had a very extensive and fruitful discussion on a variety of issues, and that's what you'd expect when friends meet together.

I—the President is committed to democracy and rule of law. He was very articulate in his desire to make sure that the people of Nigeria understand that their Government will be fair and transparent and will be a government of the people. Mr. Presi-

dent, I am impressed by your commitment to reform, your adherence to the concept that rule of law, and your belief in transparency. And I congratulate you for being a strong leader.

We also talked about social justice issues, the issue of education. The President is committed to seeing to it that compulsory education is followed through on in this country, throughout the country, and I admire that. And we want to help you. The United States has got a program that is