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## Poll: Mixed feelings on kids' health insurance

By Richard Wolf, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — A majority of Americans trust Democrats to handle the issue of children's health insurance more than President Bush, but they agree with the president that government aid should be targeted to low-income families, a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll shows.

Two days before the Democratic-controlled House attempts to override Bush's veto of a five-year, \$35 billion expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the poll shows that opinions on the issue are mixed.

Fifty-two percent of respondents say they have more confidence in Democrats to deal with the issue, compared with 32% for Bush.

Slim majorities back two positions at the core of the president's opposition to the expansion:

### POLL RESULTS: [Children's health insurance issue](#)

- 52% agree with Bush that most benefits should go to children in families earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level — about \$41,000 for a family of four. Only 40% say benefits should go to families earning up to \$62,000, as the bill written by Democrats and some Republicans would allow.

- 55% are very or somewhat concerned that the program would create an incentive for families to drop private insurance. Bush and Republican opponents have called that a step toward government-run health care.

Taken together, the results show that while Bush may be losing the political battle with Democrats, he may be doing better on policy.

Mike Leavitt, Bush's secretary of Health and Human Services, said the policy is most important. "There's a lot of politics going on right now. But the politics will last a matter of weeks," Leavitt said Monday. "The policy here will go on for decades. We have to get this right."

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Rep. Rahm Emanuel, D-Ill., said other polls have shown a much bigger edge for Democrats. "This debate is set up,"

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he said. "It's set up about 10 million children or not."

The Democrats' plan would increase enrollment from about 6 million now to about 10 million by 2012. Bush and most Republicans object to the inclusion of adults and children in middle-income families. Some states already enroll adults and middle-income families under waivers approved by the Clinton and Bush administrations.

The Children's Health Insurance Program was created in 1997 to help children in "working poor" families who earned too much to qualify for Medicaid. It now costs about \$5 billion a year to insure more than 6 million children.

The House and Senate have each voted twice to expand the program. The House initially approved a more sweeping five-year, \$50 billion increase but eventually compromised with the Senate, where Republicans have more influence, at \$35 billion. Bush has proposed a \$5 billion increase over five years.

Robert Laszewski, an independent health policy consultant, said the poll results are not surprising. Unless people understand how expensive health insurance is, he said, "the notion that the government should be paying health insurance for the middle class is nuts."

"For most Americans, there's a recognition that people at moderate income levels are struggling to afford health insurance," said Mark McClellan, former administrator of the federal Medicaid and Medicare programs. "They're just not sure that having the government pay almost all of the cost is the way to solve the problem."

Democrats, labor unions and liberal advocacy groups have been running TV and radio ads in more than 20 congressional districts in an effort to sway Republicans' votes. So far, the campaign has not made a difference.

"The minute you raise the stakes like this, the more you cement in your opposition," said Oklahoma Rep. Tom Cole, chairman of the House Republicans' campaign committee.

Bush, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have said they're willing to talk if Thursday's veto override fails, as both sides expect. The two sides have firm opening positions: Leavitt says the funding doesn't need to be "anywhere near" \$35 billion. Pelosi says 10 million children must be covered.

In the poll of 1,009 adults Friday through Sunday, about half were asked about children's health care. Those questions have a margin of error of +/-5 percentage points.

## Poll results

How closely have you been following the news about the children's health insurance bill?

	Very closely	Somewhat closely	Not too closely	Not at all	No opinion
2007 Oct 12-14	17	34	30	19	*

Based on what you have heard or read about this bill, who do you have more confidence in to handle this issue?

	Bush	Democrats	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
2007 Oct 12-14	32	52	10	5

As you may know, the Democrats want to allow a family of four earning about \$62,000 to qualify for the program. President Bush wants most of the increases to go to families earning less than \$41,000. Whose side do you favor?

	Bush	Democrats	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
2007 Oct 12-14	52	40	3	4

How concerned are you that expanding this program would create an incentive for middle class Americans to drop private health insurance for a public program?

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not too concerned	Not concerned at all	No opinion
2007 Oct 12-14 22	33	25	17	2	

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