

CHUCK GRASSLEY AGREES WITH THE NETROOTS

Like many of us, Grassley argues that if you bring an issue that has widespread support among the electorate up for a vote often enough, you will eventually convince intransigent Republicans to vote for it.

Grassley said if he were the Democrats, he would send the SCHIP expansion to a vote every three months, along with campaign advertisements accusing Republicans of abandoning children. That way, pressure would mount either on Bush to sign the bill or on House Republicans to override the veto.

Of course, Grassley is referring to SCHIP and not the Iraq War. But the comment—and the article more generally—is worthwhile nonetheless. For Grassley states clearly that the Bush Administration is willing to sustain awful policy outcomes to make an ideological point.

Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) and White House aides agreed that Bush's opposition to the legislation stems not from its price tag but from far larger health policy issues. The White House wants to use the issue of uninsured children to resurrect the president's long-dormant proposals to change the federal tax code to help the uninsured, adults and children alike, Grassley said, calling that a laudable goal but unrealistic politically.

[snip]

Asked if Bush was holding the children's health bill hostage, Grassley said, "Yes."

The reporter should have posed that last question again, asking Grassley whether Bush is holding children's health—and not just the bill—hostage. Because that's clearly what is happening.

And, as Grassley makes clear, Bush has created this crisis—in which children's health will suffer for Bush's ideological ideas. Back in the spring, Grassley encouraged Bush to work with Congress to push his privatized insurance scheme. But Bush did nothing, setting up the crisis we'll see after this bill passes and Bush vetoes it.

In talks this spring with Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt, White House National Economic Council Director Al Hubbard and Hubbard's deputy, Keith Hennessey, Grassley discussed linking an extension of the 10-year-old SCHIP program to a more ambitious effort to address the adult uninsured. Grassley encouraged the White House to try to round up Democratic support for that approach, but when White House officials made no such effort, Grassley told them in April that the children's health program would have to stand alone. [my emphasis]

Bush will willingly make anyone—including uninsured children—suffer to win his ideological pissing contests.

And if Democrats can't make it clear that these are the stakes, we might as well fold and go home.