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## **NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STUDY SLATED TO RECEIVE FUNDING FOR FIRST PHASE OF IMPLEMENTATION**

The U.S. House of Representatives has approved a Joint Funding Resolution for FY 2007 that includes \$69 million for implementation of the National Children's Study (NCS). The Joint Funding Resolution is needed to keep the federal government operating because the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress did not approve a budget for FY 2007. The U.S. Senate is expected to consider the Resolution before February 15<sup>th</sup>.

After an investment of over \$50 million to plan this ground breaking study, the \$69 million will allow participating institutions to begin enrolling pregnant women this year. As currently designed, the NCS would follow a representative sample of 100,000 pregnant women and their children from the prenatal period until the child reaches age 21, and would examine the impact of a broad range of environmental influences (physical, chemical, biological, and social) with the purpose of identifying the root causes of many childhood and adult diseases. Approximately one year after the full study is underway researchers will begin a thorough review of data pertaining to premature birth and pregnancy outcomes and, using this data, will focus on an array of serious pediatric health problems. This landmark study holds the potential to dramatically enhance understanding of the causes of preterm birth, birth defects, and infant mortality as well as childhood onset of disease.

## **MARCH OF DIMES CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S FY 08 BUDGET PROPOSAL ON PREGNANT WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN**

On February 5, 2007 the Administration released its budget proposal for fiscal year 2008. This is the first step in a long process during which Congress debates and decides upon federal funding levels for the next fiscal year. Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, president of the March of Dimes, issued a statement on the proposal voicing major concerns with certain aspects of the proposal.

While the Administration's budget proposal includes a few modest initiatives to address the growing problem of uninsured children, the March of Dimes is deeply disappointed that funding levels recommended for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), as well as health research and other services,

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are wholly inadequate.

The Administration calls for reauthorization of SCHIP and acknowledges, in the documents accompanying the budget, that additional resources are needed. However, the proposed increase in funding is insufficient even to maintain current eligibility levels and, if approved by Congress, would lead to the loss of coverage for several hundred thousand pregnant women and children who rely on SCHIP for their health insurance.

Another issue of concern to the Foundation is the recommendation for major changes in the Medicaid program. Medicaid is the source of health insurance for over 40% of births nationwide in addition to paying for an estimated 40% of the medical costs associated with premature birth and providing comprehensive health insurance for 28 million – 1 in 3 – children. This program is a lifeline for families whose children need specialty medical care for birth defects and long term disabilities associated with preterm birth. At a time when there are record numbers of uninsured women and children, the March of Dimes press statement termed the policy proposal “shortsighted” as the program changes recommended would undermine the funding and structure of a program that functions as a safety net for millions of low-income pregnant women, children and their families.

Several other important Federal programs also fare poorly in the Administration’s budget proposal.

The proposal provides inadequate funding for the National Institutes of Health, proposes budget reductions for critical functions at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and eliminates funding for newborn hearing screening. The Foundation’s press statement terms investment in these programs as central to improving the health of the nation’s women and children and makes clear that the Foundation’s volunteers and staff will work with Congress to find the funding necessary to support them.

## **NEW CONGRESS BRINGS NEW LEADERSHIP TO COMMITTEES**

On January 3, 2007, the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress began. As a result of the 2006 elections, Congressional committees have new leadership. The following committees handle issues of particular interest to the March of Dimes.

### Senate Finance Committee

Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Chair

Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA), Ranking Member

Senator John Rockefeller (D-WV), Chair Health Subcommittee

Senator Orin Hatch (R-UT), Ranking Member Health Subcommittee

### Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP)

Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Chair

Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY), Ranking Member

Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT), Chair Children and Families Subcommittee

Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Ranking Member Children and Families

## Subcommittee

### Senate Appropriations Committee

Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), Chair

Senator Cochran (R-MS), Ranking Member

Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chair Labor Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) Subcommittee

Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), Ranking Member LHHS Subcommittee

### Senate Budget Committee

Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND), Chair

Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), Ranking Member

### House Energy and Commerce Committee

Rep. John Dingell (D-MI), Chair

Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), Ranking Member

Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Chair Health Subcommittee

Rep. Nathan Deal (R-GA), Ranking Member Health Subcommittee

### House Appropriations Committee

Rep. David Obey (D-WI), Chair full Committee and LHHS Subcommittee

Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA), Ranking Member

Rep. Jim Walsh (R-NY), Ranking Member LHHS Subcommittee

### House Budget Committee

Rep. John Spratt (D-SC), Chair

Rep. Paul Ryan (D-WI), Ranking Member

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## **REPORTS FROM the REGIONS**

### **NORTH**

At their October 2006 Lobby Day at the Capitol, New Jersey March of Dimes advocates met with legislators to generate support for a newborn screening bill that would codify newborn screening and treatment, provide parental and provider education, and increase the newborn screening fee to fund treatment. In early 2006, New Jersey joined an elite group of states who require by law that all newborns be screened for 29 treatable conditions as recommended by the American College of Medical Genetics and endorsed by the March of Dimes.



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**Advocates gather with bill sponsor Assemblyman John F. McKeon (second from right) at the New Jersey State House for March of Dimes Day at the Capitol**



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**While advocating for the newborn screening bill, volunteers visited the Senate chambers during March of Dimes Day at the Capitol.**

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## SOUTH

March of Dimes National Ambassador Zeek Taylor and his mother Betty recently met with Glen Richardson, Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives. Zeek thanked Speaker Richardson for his support of expanded newborn screening which is projected to benefit approximately 138,000 infants annually. Zeek also urged Speaker Richardson to support Georgia's PeachCare program, which provides access to health coverage for children up to age 18 whose family incomes are slightly above eligibility levels for Medicaid.



**Pictured at front is National Ambassador Zeek Taylor and from left to right: Elise Linden-Antrobus, Georgia Chapter Lead Public Affairs Staff, Speaker Richardson, Betty Taylor and Ellen Williams, Georgia Chapter Public Affairs Consultant.**

At a press conference on December 13, 2006, Congressman Michael Castle (R-DE) addressed the neonatology staff at Delaware's Christiana Care Health System. Congressman Castle described the provisions of the PREEMIE Act, which was approved by Congress on December 9 and signed into law by President Bush on December 22, 2006.



**Pictured from left to right are: Dr. David Paul, Neonatologist and Chairman of Delaware's Healthy Mother and Infant Consortium; Dr. John Stefano, Medical Director, Christiana Care Neonatology Department and March of Dimes Chapter Board and NICU Committee Member; Leslie Kosek, Delaware Chapter State Director; and Congressman Castle.**

## **WEST**

After months of advocacy by the Oklahoma Chapter, on November 21, 2006, the State Health Department's (OSHD) Board of Health voted to add smoking cessation counseling to Medicaid coverage for pregnant women. The new benefit goes into effect immediately.

The Western Region welcomes new National Office of Volunteers (NOV) member and pediatrician, Dr. Meganne Walsh to its Public Affairs team. Dr. Walsh follows retiring NOV member Frank Wall as chair of the Western Region Public Affairs Committee (WR-PAC) and NOV representative for the Region. A long time March of Dimes volunteer, Dr. Walsh has served as the chair of the Texas Public Affairs Committee and vice-chair of the WR-PAC.



**Dr. Meganne Walsh**