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**For Immediate Release**

## **Governor Bill Richardson urges Congress to pay Federal share of health care for kids**

*Santa Fe, November 19, 2004* – Governor Bill Richardson joined four members of New Mexico’s Congressional delegation and other Governors in urging Congress to end the federal bait-and-switch that penalizes states for investing money in health care for children. Without a change from Congress, New Mexico could lose \$49.8 million in federal money that was meant to pay for its Medicaid State Children’s Health Insurance Program.

“We need to end this bait-and-switch,” Governor Bill Richardson said. “It’s not fair for the federal government to take a walk while states like New Mexico invest more money in kids’ health care. We shouldn’t be punished for doing the right thing.”

New Mexico is one of 11 states that were shortchanged when SCHIP was created in 1997. Congress took advantage of the fact that those states were already providing health care for thousands of low-income children, and only allowed them to use a portion of SCHIP money to cover that vulnerable population. Now, the federal governments is poised to take that money back, leaving New Mexico to pick up the tab for covering children who deserve access to quality health care.

Letters signed by Governor Richardson, Senators Domenici and Bingaman and Congressmen Udall and Pearce have been sent to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Senate Finance Committee and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, urging them to use these dollars for New Mexico and the other 10 states and put them on equal footing with the rest of the states.

“New Mexico should not be penalized for providing health coverage to children before the federal government provided incentives to do so,” said Senator Jeff Bingaman, who led the effort in the Senate for a bipartisan letter on this issue. “Our state has an extremely high uninsured rate, and too many of those who go without health insurance are children. We must continue the fight to provide coverage to more of New Mexico’s kids.”

“If this issue isn’t dealt with on the federal level, New Mexico could end up picking up the bill,” said Pamela Hyde, Secretary of the Human Services Department, which runs the Medicaid program in New Mexico.