

Children This week Congress is again grasping for more control over the health of American children with the expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Parents who think federally subsidized health care might be a good idea should be careful what they wish for. Despite political rhetoric about a War on Drugs, federally-funded programs result in far more teenage drug use than the most successful pill pusher on the playground. These pills are given out as a result of dubious universal mental health screening programs for school children, supposedly directed toward finding mental disorders or suicidal tendencies. The use of antipsychotic medication in children has increased fivefold between 1995 and 2002. More than 2.5 million children are now taking these medications, and many children are taking multiple drugs at one time. With universal mental health screening being implemented in schools, pharmaceutical companies stand to increase their customer base even more, and many parents are rightfully concerned. Opponents of one such program called TeenScreen, claim it wrongly diagnoses children as much as 84% of the time, often incorrectly labeling them, resulting in the assigning of medications that can be very damaging. While we are still awaiting evidence that there are benefits to mental health screening programs, evidence that these drugs actually cause violent psychotic episodes is mounting. Many parents have very valid concerns about the drugs to which a child labeled as "suicidal" or "depressed," or even ADHD, could be subjected. Of further concern is the subjectivity of diagnosis of mental health disorders. The symptoms of ADHD are strikingly similar to indications that a child is gifted, and bored in an unchallenging classroom. In fact, these programs, and many of the syndromes they attempt to screen for, are highly questionable. Parents are wise to question them. As it stands now, parental consent is required for these screening programs, but in some cases mere passive consent is legal. Passive consent is obtained when a parent receives a consent form and fails to object to the screening. In other words, failure to reply is considered affirmative consent. In fact, TeenScreen advocates incorporating their program into the curriculum as a way to by-pass any consent requirement. These universal, or mandatory, screening programs being called for by TeenScreen and the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health should be resisted. Consent must be express, written, voluntary and informed. Programs that refuse to give parents this amount of respect, should not receive federal funding. Moreover, parents should not be pressured into screening or drugging their children with the threat that not doing so constitutes child abuse or neglect. My bill, The Parental Consent Act of 2007 is aimed at stopping federal funding of these programs. We don't need a village, a bureaucrat, or the pharmaceutical industry raising our children. That's what parents need to be doing.