

In January, the [House voted](#) on an earlier version of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) expansion that included a ban on hospitals being owned and operated by local physicians. For more information on the SCHIP legislation, [click here](#) (hyperlink to above e-update). This would have had a negative impact on several hospitals in Northern California, and would have completely shut down a Yuba City hospital scheduled to open in the very near future. These hospitals provide jobs and economic vitality to the communities surrounding them. I sent a letter to leaders in the Senate urging them to drop this provision and am pleased to report that it was not included in the final legislation passed by Congress.

Additionally, the economic stimulus bill currently being debated in Congress includes a program to pay hospitals for adopting computerized record-keeping systems. As passed by the House, the program excludes critical access hospitals -- small rural hospitals that are the only acute-care providers in many North State communities. I expressed concern about this omission when the House Ways and Means Committee considered the bill. A revised version now being considered by the Senate does allow critical access hospitals to receive these payments. I have strong [concerns](#) with the stimulus bill as a whole and do not believe that an effort to promote electronic medical records, which won't even begin until 2011, should be part of a measure that is advertised as providing immediate economic relief. However, I feel it's essential to ensure that rural hospitals are treated fairly in any health technology initiative that goes through Congress.