

## Perry opposes CHIP expansion plan

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AUSTIN, Texas — Gov. Rick Perry says he doesn't support a Senate plan to get up to 80,000 more children into the government-subsidized Children's Health Insurance Program, indicating he'll veto the measure if it gets to his desk.

The Senate resurrected the plan late Wednesday by adding it to another bill, but House lawmakers rejected the amendment Thursday and sent both measures back to the Senate. The legislative session ends Monday.

Speaking with reporters Thursday, Perry was asked if he'd consider adding expanding CHIP to a possible special session. Perry has warned lawmakers he may call them back to Austin if they don't restore Texas' depleted windstorm insurance fund and could add CHIP to the agenda if he wanted.

"No. I would probably not be in favor of that expansion even if it came to my

desk. I think the members know that," Perry said. "That is not what I consider to be a piece of legislation that has the vast support of the people of the state of Texas."

The Republican governor's comments may doom the plan from getting much further if lawmakers presume he'd veto anything they send him.

Currently only families making less than twice the federal poverty level — around \$44,100 for a family of four — are eligible for the joint federal and state health care program.

The Senate plan allows families making up to 300 percent of the poverty level to get into the program by paying a share of the cost. Some families making more than that would be able to fully buy into the program.

Supporters of the expansion — including child advocates, business groups and

doctors — say families who don't qualify and can't get coverage elsewhere are forced to get divorced or quit their jobs to get CHIP coverage for their children.

Opponents say the current level of coverage ensures that only those who truly need coverage get it. They believe families would drop private plans for the government one.

"It is unconscionable, in these tough economic times, that Governor Perry will veto legislation that will help working Texas parents purchase insurance for their children," said Rep. Garnet Coleman, a Houston Democrat who noted versions of the bill have already passed the House and Senate. "The Governor is clearly out of touch with the needs of Texas." Associated Press correspondent Jackie Stone contributed to this report.