

March 6, 2009

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**Next Week in Congress:** There are several upcoming hearings on various health issues.

- The Senate Finance Committee will hold a hearing on Thursday, March 12, entitled, “Workforce Issues in Health Care Reform: Assessing the Present and Preparing for the Future.”
- The Health Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee will hold two hearings next week. On Tuesday, March 10, the hearing will be “Making Health Care Work for American Families: Designing a High Performing Healthcare System.”
- On Wednesday, March 11, the Subcommittee holds a hearing on “How Do You Fix Our Ailing Food Safety System?”
- Also on Wednesday, the Health Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee will hold a hearing on “Health Reform in the 21st Century: Expanding Coverage, Improving Quality and Controlling Costs.”

## 1. AAFP TAKES PART IN WHITE HOUSE FORUM ON HEALTH REFORM

On Thursday, March 5, the President held a forum at the White House on Health Reform and invited Ted Epperly, MD, AAFP President to be among the 120 participants. Besides Congressional legislators from both political parties and both chambers, the forum included representatives of the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Cardiology. In addition to physician groups, the forum participants included representatives of business, labor, insurance, pharmaceuticals, nurses, patient groups and citizens affected by the health care system.

At the closing of the forum, the President called on Dr. Epperly as the representative of physicians in the US and asked how physicians will be part of the solution for the problems of health care in the country. He responded, “Speaking on behalf of over 100,000 family doctors, we’re ready to do our part. We very much believe that we need to expand coverage in this country to everyone, and we need to fix the workforce shortage, so that all those patients have a place to go. We’ll roll up our shirt sleeves and do everything possible to make this work, because it is the right thing to do....”

## **2. SPENDING BILL STALLS IN SENATE, STOP-GAP FUNDING TO BE EXTENDED**

On the eve of the expiration date of the government's stop-gap spending measure, Majority Leader Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) announced that the Senate was one vote shy of the 60 votes needed to provide final approval of the FY 2009 spending bill. To prevent a partial shutdown of the government, by a vote of 328-50, the House passed a continuing resolution or CR (HJ Res 38) keeping the government in business through midnight March 11. The Senate soon will pass the CR and then will complete action on the omnibus appropriations bill for FY 2009 (HR 1105) next week. Senate Republicans have said they need more time to offer amendments. The CR provides money for the programs and agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services and the other programs that Congress could not agree to fund before the election.

## **3. AAFP CALLS FOR DOUBLING PRIMARY CARE MEDICINE TRAINING FUNDS**

On Monday, March 2, AAFP and the academic family medicine organizations wrote to Mary Wakefield, the incoming Administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration, to recommend that the agency use recently enacted economic recovery monies to double Title VII, Section 747 primary care health professions training grants and allow for equipment acquisition. The letter can be found on the AAFP Federal Advocacy website at [http://www.aafp.org/online/etc/medialib/aafp\\_org/documents/policy/fed/statements/030209.Par.0001.File.tmp/AAFP-AFMAA-LetterHRSA3-2-09.pdf](http://www.aafp.org/online/etc/medialib/aafp_org/documents/policy/fed/statements/030209.Par.0001.File.tmp/AAFP-AFMAA-LetterHRSA3-2-09.pdf).

## **4. COMMITTEE APPROVES BILL TO GIVE FDA AUTHORITY OVER TOBACCO**

On Wednesday, March 4, by a vote of 39-13, the House Energy and Commerce Committee approved the *Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act* (HR 1256), which would give the Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate tobacco products. The bill is nearly identical to a measure that passed the House in the previous Congress, but was never finally acted on by the Senate. It will be considered by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee next week and may be taken up by the House during the week of March 16.

## **5. AAFP BRINGS FAMILY MEDICINE'S MESSAGE TO CAPITOL HILL**

Government Relations staff attended health care events this week for several Congressional legislators:

- **Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA)**, who serves on the Health Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee. Rep. Thompson spoke of the need to address the rising costs of health care and how those costs are affecting the bottom line of small businesses in his district. Although he has heard lots of talk about a "single payer" system, he does not believe that will be an option in the coming debate. He believes that a government sponsored health insurance option will be included in the reforms. Rep. Thompson expressed support for loan forgiveness programs and funding for Title VII to encourage more medical students to go into primary care.
- **The Tuesday Group**, comprised of centrist Republican members of the House. Attending the event were Representatives Tim Murphy (PA), Roscoe Bartlett (MD), Shelly Moore Capito (WV), Charlie Dent (PA), Mark Kirk (IL), Ginny Brown-Waite (FL), Jo Ann Emerson (MO), Candice Miller (MI), Patrick Tiberi (OH), Fred Upton (MI), Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA), Judy Biggert (IL), and Michael Castle (DE). Tuesday Group members feel that the free market must be part of health care reform and they expressed concern over how a government sponsored health insurance option would affect the private sector. There also was a discussion of increasing support for primary care and how to accomplish that without taking away from other specialties.
- **Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA)**, a cardio-thoracic surgeon. Rep. Boustany is a new member of the House Ways and Means Committee. He spoke of his concerns with the government attempting to insert itself into the doctor-patient relationship and cited the

comparative effectiveness provisions in the recently passed economic recovery bill. He sent a letter to the Obama administration asking that quality of treatment – and not cost – be taken into consideration when recommending treatment and coverage options. He is hoping that the Administration will seek input from the Congressional legislators who are physicians as the health care debate goes forward.

- **Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ)**, who serves on the House Armed Services; Science and Technology; and the Foreign Affairs Committees and is a member of the Blue Dogs, a group of moderate Democrats. She spoke about having held several town hall meetings on the economic stimulus package to let her constituents know how the bill will provide help to face the ever worsening economic downturn. Staff mentioned that Congress should invest in training more primary care physicians.
- **Rep. Joe Crowley (D-NY)**, a member of the House Ways & Means Committee, Chief Deputy Whip and newly appointed Vice Chairman of Finance for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. He spoke broadly about the economy and how it would determine what can be done for health care reform. He said he knew physicians were concerned about the pending Medicare payment cuts. He also spoke about the coming physician workforce shortage.

## 6. AAFP CONTINUES TO TRAIN GRASSROOTS ADVOCATES

This week, the AAFP sent its monthly training email to grassroots advocates. The email focused on how family physicians can personalize their communications to congressional offices and make them stand out in the sea of form letters. All grassroots training articles can be found online at: <http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/policy/grassroots/training2009.html>.

## 7. SCOPE OF PRACTICE ISSUES

- The **Colorado Academy of Family Physicians** is working in concert with the Colorado Medical Society and other medical specialty organizations on the reauthorization of the *Nurse Practice Act*. A state-sanctioned committee spent months working on revisions, but left one issue unresolved: i. e., delegated medical functions. Currently, the legislation eliminates delegated medical functions from the definition of advanced practice nursing, which would throw existing physician-NP relationships into a legal cloud. The CO AFP issued two SpeakOut alerts urging members to contact their Senators in support of the amendment favored by organized medicine that would restore delegated medical functions to the legislation's definition of advanced practice nursing.
- The **Iowa Academy of Family Physicians** asked members to contact their Representatives in opposition to a bill to allow practice by direct-entry (lay) midwives. The bill would license direct-entry midwives to provide midwifery services and dispense certain medications. Nearly 60 family physicians have contacted their Representatives in opposition to the bill.