

May 22, 2009

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NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON...

The House and Senate are in recess for the Memorial Day holiday. They are scheduled to reconvene on June 1.

1. GOP HEALTH REFORM PLANS INTRODUCED

Reps. Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Devin Nunes (R-CA), along with Senators Tom Coburn, MD (R-OK) and Richard Burr (R-NC) introduced the *Patients' Choice Act* on Wednesday, May 20. The release announcing the introduction describes these bills, HR 2520 and S 1099, as "health care reform legislation that delivers on the shared principles of promoting universal access to quality, affordable health care, and does so without adding billions of dollars in new debt or taxes."

The *Patients' Choice Act* would eliminate the tax break for employer-provided health insurance benefits and offer an annual \$2,300 tax credit to individuals or \$5,700 for families to offset the cost of health insurance. Describing the health security for low-income families and American seniors as "threatened by the outdated formulas and exploding costs of Medicaid and Medicare," the bills' sponsors propose to integrate "low-income families with dependent children into higher-quality private plans through direct assistance." More information on the *Patients' Choice Act* is available at <http://www.house.gov/ryan/PCA/index.htm>.

Another Republican plan was also introduced on Wednesday by Reps. Mark Kirk (IL-10) and Charlie Dent (PA-15), co-chairs of the moderate GOP Tuesday Group. The *Medical Rights Act* (HR 2516) seeks to guarantee that private health care cannot be denied by government restrictions. Rep. Kirk has posted additional information about his legislation on his website at http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/il10_kirk/healthcare_release.html.

Health care reform is likely to be considered by the House and Senate later this summer.

2. FDA TOBACCO REGULATION BILL PASSES SENATE COMMITTEE

Legislation giving the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to regulate tobacco products moved forward as a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on Wednesday, May 20 voted 15-8 to approve HELP Chairman Edward Kennedy's (D-MA) *Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act* (S 982).

3. MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN D.C. PAC EVENTS DURING FMCC

Dr. Jim King made a presentation on behalf of FamMedPAC this week at the Family Medicine Congressional Conference (FMCC). The PAC and Grassroots Program jointly sponsored a reception at the FMCC, where **Rep. Xavier Becerra** from California, a leader of the House Democrats, spoke. Rep. Becerra told attendees to stay in touch with their legislators and to support the PAC. The PAC received over \$22,000 on contributions during the Conference.

Several AAFP members in town for the FMCC attended fundraisers on behalf of FamMedPAC.

Illinois Chapter Exec Vince Keenan and AAFP Government Relations staff attended a health care breakfast for **Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)**. Rep. Schakowsky serves on the Health Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

AAFP GR staff attended a health care lunch for **Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA)**, the Republican Whip and a member of the Ways and Means Committee. Rep. Cantor told the assembled health care representatives that the Republicans would not support any health reform bill that contained a government-run "public plan" health insurance option.

GR staff were invited to a one-on-one lunch with **Rep. John Fleming (R-LA)**, a family physician and member of AAFP. Rep. Fleming is in his first term in Congress. Rep. Fleming spoke about the importance of primary care and the Patient Centered Medical Home in the health reform effort, and the HIT provisions in the recovery act. Rep. Fleming believes sub-specialists should support the PCMH since the medical home will allow family physicians to make sure their patients get referred to and actually keep appointments with the appropriate sub-specialist.

Dr. Randy Wexler, a member of the FamMedPAC Board of Directors, and GR staff attended a dinner for Dr. Wexler's Congressman, **Rep. Pat Tiberi (R-OH)**. Rep. Tiberi serves on the Ways and Means Committee. Rep. Tiberi was interested in how family physicians felt about the public-plan option. Dr. Wexler told him that if the plan reimbursed physicians as Medicare does, many physicians would have a difficult time accepting new patients under the plan.

Dr. Candice Ireton and GR staff attended a fundraiser for **Rep. John Boehner (R-OH)**, the Minority Leader of the House. Dr. Ireton spoke to Rep. Boehner about the PCMH, the need for support for primary care in the health reform debate. Rep. Boehner said that the Democrats could pass any plan they wanted without Republican support, but that Republicans would propose their own plan and attempt to work with the Democrats.

Dr. Howard McMahan, the President of the Georgia AFP, his wife, and GR staff attended a fundraiser for **Rep. Tom Price (R-GA)**. Rep. Price is an orthopedic surgeon. Rep. Price's wife, an anesthesiologist, also attended the dinner. Rep. Price expressed his opposition to the "public plan" option being proposed by Democrats as part of health care reform.

Dr. David Carlyle and his daughter attended a dinner for his Congressman, **Rep. Tom Latham (R-IA)**. Rep. Latham serves on the Appropriations Committee. Rep. Latham expressed his support for primary care and pointed out his support for Title VII funding for primary care residency programs.

GR staff attended a health care dinner for **Rep. Paul Broun (R-GA)**. Rep. Broun is a family physician. Dr. Tom Price and Dr. Phil Gingrey, both Congressmen from Georgia, also attended. Rep. Broun is interested in promoting the PCMH and asked AAFP staff to meet with his staff to provide support materials. He expressed his opposition to the Democratic "public plan" option, saying it would lead to socialized medicine and be bad for both patients and physicians.

4. GRASSROOTS: CONNECT FOR REFORM GENERATES LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

In conjunction with the release of a recent AAFP member survey indicating the harmful effects of the recession on family physicians and their patients, the AAFP asked all Connect for Reform users to write a letter to the editor of their local paper(s). The AAFP template letter provided focused on the need for comprehensive health care reform centered on primary care. After just two days, AAFP Connect for Reform users have sent 64 letters.

5. STATE ISSUES

- **New Study Examines Effects of Massachusetts Coverage Law**

The Massachusetts Health Insurance Law of 2006 has allowed the state to have the lowest uninsured rate in the country while having only a "marginal impact" on state spending, according to a report by the [Massachusetts Taxpayer Association](#), the [AP/Boston Globe](#) reports. A summary of the report is available [online](#).

- **Vermont Moves towards Disclosure of Pharmaceutical Marketing to Physicians**

The Vermont Legislature has passed legislation that bans most gifts from pharmaceutical and medical device companies to health care providers, administrators and facilities in the state. The legislation would go further than similar laws in other states like Massachusetts and Minnesota by requiring drug and medical device manufacturers who give gifts to health providers to publicly disclose recipients' names and dollar amounts of payments and gifts. In a recent report, the Vermont [Office of the Attorney General](#) said that medical product makers spent about \$2.9 million on promotional efforts to the state's health care providers in fiscal year 2008 and that nearly half of the state's 4,573 licensed providers had received some type of incentive from drugmakers in the same year. Gov. Jim Douglas (R) is expected to sign the law, which would take effect July 1. Several state medical groups -- including the [Vermont Association for Mental Health](#) and the [Vermont Medical Society](#) -- have indicated support for the legislation.

6. OTHER ISSUES OF INTEREST TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS...

- **HAMBURG CONFIRMED TO LEAD FDA**

The Senate on Monday, May 18 confirmed Margaret (Peggy) Hamburg as FDA commissioner by voice vote. Hamburg, a former New York City health commissioner, is expected to focus immediately on FDA's response to the H1N1 flu virus as well as food safety issues. Hamburg most recently was vice president of the Nuclear Threat Initiative's biological program and formerly worked at HHS, where she led the effort to develop a pandemic preparedness plan.

- **OBAMA TAPS NYC HEALTH COMMISSIONER FOR CDC**

President Obama announced on Friday, May 15 he has appointed Thomas Frieden, who is commissioner of the New York City Health Department, as director of the Centers for Disease Control. Frieden, who will begin his work at the CDC in early June, spearheaded the effort to ban smoking and trans-fats in the city's restaurants. Obama also announced that acting CDC Director Rich Besser, who has led the CDC's Coordinating Office for Terrorism Preparedness and Emergency Response for the past four years, will continue in that role.