



# GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY

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AAFP Division of Government Relations — 2021 Massachusetts Avenue, NW — Washington, DC

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### 1. DR. FIELDS SPEAKS OUT ON NEW APPROACHES TO MEDICAL TORT REFORM

Larry Fields, MD, spoke at a Capitol Hill press event on behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians in support of the *Fair and Reliable Medical Justice Act* (S. 1481 and HR 2497). Dr. Fields addressed the need for legislation to restore fairness and reliability to the medical justice system by fostering alternatives to current medical tort litigation. He also highlighted the importance of a patient-centered medical home to quality care.

The bill would provide competitive grants to 10 states for innovative approaches to medical liability reforms. The event featured three of the four original sponsors of the bills: Senator Michael B. Enzi (R-WY) and Representatives Jim Cooper (D-TN) and Max Thornberry (R-TX). Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) was unable to attend. Also addressing the press was Paul Barringer and Philip Howard of Common Good; Dr. Doug Laube, ACOG; Margaret Vanamringe, The Joint Commission; Sharon King Donahue, NCQA, Maryland State Delegate Dan Morhaim, MD (emergency medicine); and Lee Derr, Counsel to Pennsylvania State Senator Jane Orie.

### 2. SUPPLEMENTAL SPENDING BILL STOPS MEDICAID GME RULES

The House (280-142) and the Senate (80-14) passed HR 2206, a supplemental spending bill that provides \$98 billion for military operations and \$22 billion for domestic and security-related items. The bill also contains \$650 million to fund the SCHIP shortfall. In addition, it prevents HHS from implementing rules restricting Medicaid payments for graduate medical education and for Inter-Governmental Transfers to boost the federal match.

### 3. REP. PETE STARK WANTS MEDICARE ADVANTAGE REDUCTIONS

In a hearing last week, the chairman of the Health Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), asked the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to account for the federal funds given to Medicare Advantage plans to provide

extra benefits for their enrollees. He hopes to target these as offsets for halting the pending 10-percent cuts in Medicare payments to physicians. He said he anticipates that before Labor Day, the subcommittee will act on a bill to prevent these cuts.

#### **4. CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE AND THE MEDICAL HOME**

As early as June 7, the Finance Committee will consider the reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The discussion will be whether the program should cover more children (based on the family's income level) and whether it should be expanded to include family members who are uninsured. In addition, the bill may contain provisions to prevent the pending 10-percent cut in Medicare payments to physicians (or these provisions might be added later as the bill progresses through the Congressional maze).

The AAFP, along with the American College of Physicians, the American Osteopathic Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, along with the Patient-Centered Primary Care Coalition, has discussed with Senate staff an amendment that would authorize states to use SCHIP or Medicaid grants to fund state efforts to support physician practices that offer a patient-centered medical home. The Coalition consists of representatives from several large employers, consumer groups and physician organizations, including AAFP.

#### **5. GROWTH OF PAC EXCEEDS PREVIOUS TWO YEARS**

So far in 2007, the PAC has received \$187,528 in donations from 572 AAFP members. The average donation is \$328. If the current pace continues, the PAC should raise more in 2007 than it did in all of the 2005-2006 election cycle. The PAC has contributed a total of \$116,500 to 40 candidates and committees. Contributions have been made to 27 Democratic candidates and committees, and to 13 Republican candidates and committees.

The test of the direct marketing program, which involves fundraising letters and follow-up phone calls on behalf of the PAC, is continuing. To date, 1,355 AAFP members have been contacted, with \$68,796 in pledges received. The average pledge from prior donors is \$224, while the average pledge from non-prior donors is \$114. An additional 5,000 members will be contacted starting June 8 via e-mail, with half of those then receiving a follow up letter. All members will receive a phone call. We are testing the effectiveness of e-mail communication alone versus an e-mail and letter prior to the call.

#### **6. AAFP CONTINUES TO FILL FEDERAL KEY CONTACTS SLOTS**

On May 29, AAFP President-Elect, Dr. Jim King, and the Chair of the Commission on Governmental Advocacy, Dr. Steve Crawford, sent an email to all current AAFP Key Contacts asking for recommendations on other members who can fill the remaining Key Contact slots. As of June 1, we have at least one AAFP Key Contact for 358 of the 536 federal legislators. That is, 67 percent of the U.S. Senators and Representatives have a family physician serving as a Key Contact.

House	268 / 436 (61%)
House Key Committees & Leadership	124 / 174 (71%)
Senate	90 / 100 (90%)
Senate Key Committees & Leadership	61 / 66 (92%)

#### **7. HEALTH CARE AND THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS**

The AAFP has continued to inform members about the 2008 Presidential campaign by developing a questionnaire that will be sent to all candidates asking for their views on issues that are important to family medicine, and creating one-pagers on key issues that will be used in

meetings with campaign health advisors. All materials will be posted on the AAFP website, joining a regularly-updated calendar of campaign events; candidates' positions on healthcare; and a link to webcasts of recent debates and speeches.

- **Senator Clinton (D-NY) Proposes Reforms of Health Insurance**  
On Thursday, May 24, the Clinton campaign laid out a health care reform proposal that is designed to lower health care costs through physician payment for providing preventive care, coordination of care for the chronically ill patients and adoption of health information technology. She would pay for the expansion of services by, among other steps, reducing payment to Medicare Advantage plans, negotiating prices for Medicare Part D drugs, and bolstering comparative effectiveness research.
- **Senator Obama (D-IL) Looks to Medicaid and SCHIP to Cover the Uninsured**  
As part of a broad overhaul of health care, the Obama campaign is proposing greater emphasis on preventive and coordinated care, and the creation of a public health insurance program for Americans who are not eligible for existing federal assistance or employer-based coverage.

## 8. OF INTEREST TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS

- **Groups Want Medicare Physician Payment System to Mirror the Hospitals'**  
The AAFP, the AMA and 85 other medical groups proposed to Congress that the present Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula for paying physicians should be replaced by a payment system similar to the one used with hospitals, nursing homes and other Medicare Part A providers.
- **Committee Approves Grants for Health Informatics Training**  
On May 23, the House Science and Technology Committee approved the *10,000 Trained by 2010 Act* by voice vote. The bill (HR 1467) would authorize nearly \$100 million through 2011 for the National Science Foundation to award grants to researchers and students who work on systems that gather and manage health information. Some of the grants would be offered to universities to create Centers for Informatics Research. Other funds would go to academic scholarships. Rep. David Wu (D-OR) introduced the bill.
- **Wisconsin AFP Takes to the Airwaves**  
The Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians ratcheted up its advocacy on behalf of members this week with a radio ad attacking Governor Jim Doyle's (D) latest attempt to take money from the Injured Patients and Families Compensation Fund. The Fund exists to help keep physicians' liability insurance premiums down, or at least slow the increase of their premiums. The Fund does so by providing what is supposed to be a pot of money separate from the General Fund from which liability claims may be settled. Gov. Doyle is making his third attempt to balance the state budget by seizing money from the Fund. The WI AFP's radio ad made national news, being featured in the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation's *Daily Health Policy Report* on May 25. The ad is available online at [http://www.wafp.org/a\\_pcf.asp](http://www.wafp.org/a_pcf.asp).
- **Chiropractors at Veterans' Medical Centers**  
On May 23, by a vote of 421-1, the House approved a bill that would require chiropractic care to be available at 75 VA medical centers by the end of 2009 and at all VA medical centers by the end of 2011. The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee is tentatively scheduled to debate the measure on June 27.