



GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY

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IN THIS REPORT...

1. House Appropriations Committee Delays Acting on Funding Bill
2. A Public-Private Agency Would Compare Treatments
3. States Support Medical Home and Health Information Technology
4. HHS Asks AAFP's Advice on FY 2009 Budget
5. Key Contacts Speak Out for Increased Title VII Appropriations
6. Presidential Candidates Surveyed
7. FamMedPAC Closes in on 200 Grand
8. Of Interest to Family Physicians...
 - Edwards Campaign Endorses Medical Home
 - Screening of Newborns

1. HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS CANCELS DEBATE OF LABOR-HHS SPENDING BILL

On Thursday, June 14, the House Appropriations Committee canceled its scheduled consideration of the Labor-HHS funding bill in the face of mounting criticism from Republicans over the failure to list Member-earmarked projects. In response to Republican pressure, Committee Chairman, Rep. Dave Obey (D-WI) has agreed to amend the bill to add the list of earmarks. Several other spending bills will return to the Committee over the next two weeks before they can be debated by the House. As a result, the Committee consideration of the revised Labor-HHS bill will not take place before mid-July. The Senate Subcommittee is expected to proceed as scheduled next Tuesday, June 19.

2. AN INDEPENDENT AGENCY TO COMPARE TREATMENTS

On Tuesday, June 12, the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health held a hearing on the creation of a public-private body to oversee research and compare treatment approaches for specific medical conditions. Subcommittee Chair, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) said, "Getting reliable, unbiased comparative information is our best shot at controlling health spending while improving care and access." He also stressed the importance of the entity being "free from both industry and political influence." However, Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI), the subcommittee's senior Republican, said, "Government agencies should not be required to rely solely on comparative effectiveness data to set reimbursements or make coverage decisions." Reps. Tom Allen (D-ME) and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) are co-sponsoring legislation (HR 2184) to establish "a public-private funding mechanism which will pool federal resources with funds from health insurance plans and large employers with self-insured plans." Rep. Stark did not indicate any specific legislative plans but praised the Allen-Emerson bill.

Congressional Budget Office Director Peter Orszag at the hearing said expanded research combined with changes in payment incentives for providers and patients "offers a promising mechanism for reducing health care costs to a significant degree over the long term while maintaining or improving the health of Americans." According to Orszag, it would be difficult to predict the entity's impact on spending.

3. STATES LOOK TO HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MEDICAL HOME

The Council of State Governments' (CSG) Health Policy Task Force capped three days of meetings by identifying the medical home concept and health information technology as issues of importance to legislators in 2008. Both topics will be covered at the CSG annual meeting in November in Oklahoma City. Additionally, the task force approved Colorado SB 130 which contains specific reference to the principles of the patient-centered medical home for inclusion in the annual suggested state legislation publication to be released later this year. The co-chair of the task force is Sen. Mattie Hunter (D-IL). Ellen Brull, MD, representing the Commission on Governmental Advocacy, and AAFP staff will work with Sen. Hunter to introduce a resolution on the PC-MH in November.

4. HHS ASKS FOR AAFP'S ADVICE ON 2009 BUDGET

AAFP and 26 other groups making up the Coalition for Health Funding met on Wednesday with HHS Assistant Secretary Charles Johnson and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget, Richard Turman, as they begin to prepare the fiscal year 2009 budget.

AAFP staff commented on the importance of health profession training programs and the impact of the primary care training on Community Health Centers and the National Health Service Corps, two programs for the underserved that the administration favors. Other issues that were raised in the discussion included health disparities, health statistics, electronic medical records, care for the homeless, mental health access and pediatric dentistry for the Medicaid population.

5. KEY CONTACTS SPEAK OUT FOR INCREASED TITLE VII APPROPRIATIONS

On June 14, the AAFP asked 187 Key Contacts with Senators serving on the Appropriations Committee to speak out for increased Title VII Primary Care appropriations for FY 2008.

[Link to view Speak Out Alert.](#)

6. AAFP ASKS FOR HEALTH CARE VIEWS OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

This week, AAFP sent out a survey to all declared presidential candidates requesting their views on issues important to family medicine and will follow up with phone calls to the campaigns. All questionnaire responses will be posted on the AAFP website, communicated to members and sent to state chapters. In addition, staff are working on a presentation to state chapters of the presidential campaign project. The chapters will receive:

- suggested questions for AAFP members to ask candidates at campaign events;
- a calendar of presidential activities; and
- factsheets on "What is the AAFP"; Medicare payment; the Patient-Centered Medical Home and Health Care for All.

7. FamMedPAC DONATIONS APPROACH \$200,000

The PAC has received \$195,537 in donations from 627 AAFP members. The average donation is \$312. The PAC has contributed a total of \$156,500 to 52 candidates and committees. Contributions have been made to 32 Democratic candidates and committees, and to 20 Republican candidates and committees.

Government Relations staff attended events for these Congressional legislators:

- Rep. John Dingell (D-MI). Rep Dingell is the Chair of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
- Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-GA). Rep. Gingrey is a physician and lead sponsor of medical liability reform legislation in the 110th Congress.
- Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee roundtable with Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI).

- Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH). Sen. Brown is serving his first term in the Senate after spending seven terms in the U.S. House. Sen. Brown serves on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.
- Rep. Dennis Moore (D-KS). Rep. Moore represents Leawood, Kansas, and spoke at the PAC reception at ALF last month.
- National Republican Congressional Committee healthcare reception, with members of the House Republican Leadership.

OF INTEREST TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS...

- **Edwards Health Care Plan Includes Medical Home Proposal**

Former Sen. John Edwards (D-NC) released a more detailed version of his health care plan on Thursday, June 14. According to the campaign website, the plan would reform the insurance industry by setting national accounting standards requiring insurers to spend at least 85 percent of their premiums on patient care.

The plan would also cut the cost of and improve treatment for chronic conditions. The document also calls for the creation of patient-centered "medical homes" and requires health care markets and public plans to pro-actively monitor the health of patients with chronic ailments, to reduce complications and hospitalizations. The Edwards plan would require all insurers to cover preventive care, with public plans offering preventive care without co-payments.

- **AAFP Calls for Action on the Newborn Screening Saves Lives Act**

The AAFP signed a letter to the Senate HELP Committee Chairman, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and the senior Republican member, Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY), and Energy & Commerce Chairman, Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) and Rep. Joe Barton (D-TX) to urge prompt action on the *Newborn Screening Saves Lives Act* (S. 634/H.R. 1634). These bipartisan bills would reauthorize the *Children's Health Act* and would provide as much as \$55 million to enhance the capacity of states to expand and improve their newborn screening programs for at least the 29 conditions outlined by the American College of Medical Genetics.