



GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY

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FUNDING STOPGAP BUYS APPROPRIATORS TIME, EXTENDS SCHIP

The Congress passed a stopgap measure to fund government programs through November 16 at fiscal year 2007 levels and to reauthorize, in the short-term, high-profile programs such as the State Children's Health Insurance Program set to expire on September 30. The spending measure, known as a continuing resolution or CR, is needed to allow time for Congressional Democrats and President Bush to come to an agreement on spending priorities for fiscal year 2008 which, starts on October 1. The President has threatened to veto any appropriations bill that exceeds his budget request. However, he is expected to sign the CR, which passed the House by a vote of 404 to 14 and the Senate by 94 to 1.

The outlook for the popular SCHIP program remains murky. While the reauthorization legislation passed the Senate with enough votes to override the President's expected veto, the House did not. Despite pleas by moderate Republicans, the SCHIP bill passed the House by 265-159, which is 25 votes short of the number needed to override a veto. Opponents continue to argue that SCHIP passage would be a step toward government-run healthcare, while supporters of the legislation argue that families of poor children are unable to afford coverage.

MEDICARE FIX IN SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE HANDS

Senate Finance Committee members have begun drafting a Medicare bill that among other provisions would attempt to alleviate the Medicare payment cut, as well as establish a more detailed medical home demonstration project. AAFP staff has been deeply involved in both efforts although the ultimate resolution is unclear and likely will not occur until very late in the year when the President and Congress may be forced to move a large omnibus measure.

HOUSE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE CALLS FOR HIT INTEROPERABILITY

On Wednesday, September 26, the House Science and Technology Committee held a hearing entitled, "Meeting the Need for Standards and Interoperability in Healthcare IT." Witnesses included representatives from the American Health Information Management Association, the Alliance of Specialty Medicine, General Electric, the Hospital Corporation of America and Greenway Technologies. The hearing was in response to a bill introduced by panel chair

Representative Bart Gordon (D-TN), HR 2406, which authorizes the National Institutes of Standards and Technology (NIST) to create or adopt existing technology-neutral guidelines and standards for federal agencies, among other purposes. While all witnesses acknowledged the need for HIT interoperability, there was disagreement about whether or not NIST was the appropriate entity to create standards. During his opening statement, Rep. Gordon emphasized the fact that most care takes place in practices with less than 5 physicians, that doctors find HIT unaffordable and that the 10 percent Medicare payment cut must be stopped. The representative of the Specialty Societies articulated the identical points.

EDWARDS CALLS FOR MEDICAL TORT REFORM AND UNIVERSAL COVERAGE

On Monday, Presidential candidate John Edwards discussed proposals that would limit medical malpractice lawsuits and provide universal health coverage during a webcast organized by Families USA and the Federation of American Hospitals. He said that attorneys seeking to file malpractice suits should have to obtain certification by two experts to prove that their cases have merit. He indicated, however, that addressing malpractice likely would not significantly reduce health care costs. Edwards also outlined his health care policy noting the similarities between his longstanding proposal for universal health coverage and the plan recently released by Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY).

AAFP KEY CONTACT LIST GROWS

As of September 21, AAFP has identified Key Contacts for 421 of the 536 Congressional legislators (78%).

Chamber	Key Contacts	Target (# of legislators)
Senate	96 (96%)	100
Senate Leadership & Key Committees	62 (93%)	66
House	325 (74%)	436 (including DC)
House Leadership & Key Committees	140 (80%)	174

OTHER ISSUES OF INTEREST TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS

- On September 27, the President signed the FDA reform bill into law. The law expands substantially the agency's authority. The primary goal of the legislation is to reauthorize the FDA's drug approval program, which nets approximately \$400 million in user fees to support these efforts. Other major provisions in the bill included safety improvements in the prescription drugs and medical devices market
- This week, the House Ways and Means Committee passed Rep. Patrick Kennedy's (D-RI) bill to establish parity between mental health services and standard medical procedures. The bill now continues to the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Observers believe that the ultimate outcome will be adoption of the Senate proposal, sponsored by Rep. Kennedy's father, Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA), which permits insurance companies to make these changes a year later, among other provisions.
- The House passed legislation (H.R. 3688) to extend a number of health care provisions due to expire on September 30. Included in this bill is a six-month delay of new Medicaid requirements on the use of tamper resistant Rx pads. Separately, the Senate passed S. 2085 which also implements a six-month delay. We expect that the Senate will take up and pass the House bill and for the six-month delay to go into effect before the end of the month.

