

March 14, 2014

IN THIS REPORT...

1. House Approves SGR Repeal
2. Congressional Subcommittee Examines How to Improve Sports Safety
3. FamMedPAC Brings Family Medicine's Message to Key Legislators
4. Ways and Means Committee Examines President's FY2015 HHS Budget Request
5. March 31 Enrollment Deadline Approaches

NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON...

- * Congress is in recess next week.

1. HOUSE VOTES ON REPEAL OF SGR BUT PROGRESS IS THREATENED

The House of Representatives approved, by a vote of 238 to 181, the *SGR Repeal and Medicare Provider Payment Modernization Act* (HR 4015). However, progress toward permanent repeal has been threatened by the attachment of a provision that would pay for the \$138 billion cost of the legislation by delaying for five years the requirement that individuals have health insurance coverage or pay a penalty. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimated](#) that the delay would increase the number of people without health insurance coverage in 2018 by about 13 million, resulting in 43 million uninsured in that year. In addition, CBO estimated that, due to the pay-for provision, premiums in 2018 for policies in the individual market would increase by 10 percent to 20 percent.

Meanwhile, in the Senate, Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), the new Chairman of the Finance Committee, introduced a new version of the bill, the *Medicare SGR Repeal and Beneficiary Access Improvement Act* (S 2110). This new version contains the text of S 2000, as well as a package of other Medicare and Medicaid policies approved by the Finance Committee in December. The bill does not include a pay-for policy, the cost of which is estimated at \$177 billion over ten years. The Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) added S 2110 to the Senate calendar, and it is expected to be considered during the week of March 24. In response, Senate Republican leaders introduced an alternative version of the bill (S 2212 -- identical except financed by repealing the individual mandate of *The Affordable Care Act*).

2. HEARING FOCUSES ON SPORTS SAFETY

The Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade of the House Energy and Commerce Committee invited representatives from the sports industry -- athletes, youth and professional leagues and medical specialists in sports-related injuries. Over the past decade, attention has grown on sports-related concussions and ways to reduce the risk of such injuries, especially because of the potential for neurological illness later in life. Since youth and teens may be more likely to suffer a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and take longer to recover, youth sports have come under increased scrutiny.

The purpose of the hearing was to learn what is happening to improve player safety. The hearing took a look at rules of play, the education of medical staff, improvements in diagnosis and treatment of concussions, improved equipment design and other related concerns. One witness, Ms. Briana Scurry, former Professional Goalkeeper for the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team, shared her story of a career-ending concussion on the field, and stressed that return to play should be a decision of the medical expert not the coach. While professional sports leagues can adopt rules changes that are applied across the board for all players, governance over youth and high school sports, with millions engaged, is more decentralized and therefore harder to standardize.

3. FamMedPAC BRINGS FAMILY MEDICINE'S MESSAGE TO KEY LEGISLATORS

FamMedPAC continues to support AAFP's legislative efforts, participating in several events this week with legislators involved in the debate on the SGR fix and other healthcare issues important to family medicine. The PAC participated in events for the following legislators in Washington, D.C.:

- **Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI)**, Chair of the House Budget Committee and a member of the House Ways and Means Committee.
- **Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID)**, a dentist and a member of the House Appropriations Committee.
- **Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH)**, a member of the Senate Finance Committee and sponsor of legislation to extend the Medicaid/Medicare parity for primary care services.
- **Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN)**, a physician and member of the House Doctors Caucus.
- **Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI)**, Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee.
- **Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA)**, a physician, member of the House Doctors Caucus, and a member of the House Ways and Means Committee.
- **Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL)**, a member of the Health Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee.
- **Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA)**, a primary care physician in his first term in Congress.
- **Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA)**, an emergency physician in his first term in Congress.

4. WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE EXAMINES PRESIDENT'S BUDGET REQUEST

On Wednesday, March 12, the House Ways and Means Committee held a hearing on the President's Fiscal Year 2015 Health and Human Services budget proposals. The witness was Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Highlights included:

- Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA) mentioned *The Primary Care Workforce Access Improvement Act*, (HR 487), which the AAFP supports. Rep. Thompson highlighted the similarity between HR 487 and the Administration's proposed new "Targeted Support for Graduate Medical Education" program, recognizing that "folks tend to practice where they train." The Secretary confirmed the Administration's commitment to targeting more federal dollars toward resident training in the ambulatory setting. While neither HR 487 nor the Administration's new GME proposal is likely to become law this year, this exchange demonstrates that both lawmakers and now the Administration recognize the need to steer more federal dollars to training opportunities for primary care.
- In addition, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) elicited testimony from the Secretary on the status of the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB), which the AAFP opposes in its current form. The Secretary stated that the President has not yet submitted any nominations for IPAB, nor will he in the foreseeable future, based on current Medicare spending trends.

5. MARCH 31 ENROLLMENT DEADLINE APPROACHES

The open enrollment deadline for people to sign up for private health insurance under the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) is approaching. March 31 is the last day for people to apply for coverage; subsequently, individuals will likely be subject to a penalty. Earlier this week, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said there will be no delay or extension for the requirement that individuals secure health insurance. Sec. Sebelius reported that there are currently 4.2 million people who have selected health plans through the federal and state exchanges from October through February. The AAFP has updated our [ACA implementation page](#) with pertinent open enrollment information including deadlines and how to talk to patients about getting covered.

HHS has released some of the enrollment details. The Northeast is enrolling people at higher rates than any other region, while California and the West are leading in progress towards *Affordable Care Act* implementation. Vermont is the leading state with slightly over half of the eligible population enrolled in a plan; both Connecticut and Rhode Island have about a quarter of the eligible population enrolled. California has enrolled nearly one million in health plans, which is 25 percent of the eligible population. Enrollment rates are lowest in the Midwest and South where only slightly over 10 percent of the populations have enrolled.