

Dear Colleague,

A new energy is driving the grassroots health advocacy community as the push for comprehensive health care reform continues. Vigils, marches, and opinion pieces show that one thing remains unchanged – millions of Americans need a better health care system, and that you recognize that improvements are still within reach.

This week, we launched a renewed push for fresh voices who support health reform <<http://drsforamerica.org/insurancestories/ite.php>> through Doctors for America's online advocacy toolkit and our online Letter to the Editor tool. Meanwhile, talks continue in Washington DC on how to proceed. The President's budget sent a clear message – he expects health care reform to pass, and built his annual budget proposal around that premise. On the heels of a stirring State of the Union speech and a renewed vigor to fight for the tough changes our country needs, this edition of the newsletter explores where we are now with reform as we eye the goal line from what the President calls “the two yard line.”

Physicians Making A Difference:

Highlights from the last week

- Dr. Alejandro Necochea (MD) spoke at a rally for health insurance reform on Tuesday, January 26 in Baltimore.
- Dr. Dan Fass (CT) debated Death Panel spinmeister Betsy McCaughey on Westchester's WVOX radio show, “Westchester Open Line.”
- Dr. Vivek Murthy's (MA) [latest piece](#) in a series on health care reform in the Washington Post was published on January 29th.
- Dr. Mandy Krauthamer Cohen (DC) participated in a rally with the Families USA Conference, and was a featured guest on various radio programs at the conference's “Radio Row.” She was featured in an [interview](#) published by ACP, as well.
- Dr. David Fleisher's (MO) [opinion piece](#) about profit's role in health care was published in the Columbia Daily Tribune.
- Dr. Zaneb Beams helped the Howard County Health Department's effort to secure a health IT grant for all physicians in the county to receive EMR software, installation, and training.

Key Policy Developments

1. Health Reform Update – Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick

From the outside looking in, talks to advance health care reform may look dormant. From the inside looking around – discussions continue to push onward to find the best strategy for the most comprehensive reform possible.

This week, Speaker Pelosi has articulated the plan to pass smaller pieces of reform while working to pass a comprehensive reform package. Next week, the House is expected to work on a bill to end the health insurance companies anti-trust exemption that it shares with only one other industry – professional baseball. Following President's Day Recess, next steps include passing an “amendment” package through the Senate (using reconciliation - requiring a simple majority) which would then be followed by moving the amended Senate bill through the House.

The President has given clear signals the only thing he wants to end in the health reform fight is the heated rhetoric. The leaders in Congress and the White House continue to work towards a solution that will mean better health care for doctors and their patients.

Read more on Speaker Pelosi's proposals: www.politico.com/news/stories/0210/32427.html.

2. The 411 on the Reconciliation Process

The process for reconciliation is governed by the Budget Act of 1974 and the Senate's “Byrd Rule” prohibiting non-budgetary items from being included in the legislation. This means any provisions in a reconciliation bill must have an impact on the federal budget (either making it go up or down) and the provisions cannot increase the

- Dr. Daniel Debowy spoke to a crowd at a Rally at John Kerry's office on Tuesday, January 26th in Boston.

- A [photo](#) of a Doctors for America homemade button was featured on the front page of Politico.

- Doctors for America's first fund raising campaign has raised over \$10,000 for the advertisement to run next Tuesday in Roll Call. Thank you for your generous contributions to the campaign.

What you can do this week

1. Join a call with Senator Daschle for an Insider's View of the Road Ahead for Reform.

Monday February 8th 2010, at 5:30pm EST/ 3:30pm PST

[RSVP](#) and submit questions for Senator Daschle

2. Continue our momentum campaign: [Write a Letter to the Editor TODAY!](#)

Tell us what you've been up to

The physicians in action section of this update comes from what you tell us. Send us an e-mail and let us know what you've been up to.

3 Top Stories

Kaiser Family Health News - [The Debate Over Selling Insurance Across State Lines](#)

LA Times: [Soaring cost of healthcare sets a record](#)

Washington Post - [Ditching health reform will only dig us into a deeper deficit](#)

deficit. The Senate Parliamentarian determines which parts of the bill have to be cut in order to keep the bill qualified for the 51-vote fast-track instead of the 60-vote cloture process.

In order to start the process of reconciliation, the HELP and Finance committees first mark up provisions within their jurisdiction - and each committee's portion of the bill must lead to a net reduction of the deficit of at least \$1 billion over five years. They then give their work products to the Budget Committee which then holds its own markup process.

Once the reconciliation bill is on the Senate floor for debate, there are no limits the number of amendments that can be offered. Thus, Senators can offer an unlimited number of amendments until they literally tired out. Often a reconciliation bill is voted on right before the Senate is supposed to take a long vacation to shorten this process. The Senate won't be done with their committee work in time for the upcoming President's Week Recess so the next opportunity is the Easter Recess which starts March 28th.

Read more about reconciliation: www.tnr.com/blog/the-treatment/how-reconciliation-would-work.

3. President Obama's Budget

Last year, President Obama's budget laid the groundwork for comprehensive health care reform by creating a 10 year, \$634 billion reserve fund as a "down payment." While this year's budget does not include that reserve fund, it does budget with the assumption that a health reform bill will be enacted.

The major bulk of the health budget is funneled through the Department of Health and Human Services with a total budget of \$900 billion. There is a \$1 billion increase for the National Institutes of Health, an additional \$290 million for community health centers - to open 25 new centers and serve 2 million new patients. The COBRA program is extended by another 10 months. The Indian Health Service received an 8% increase to \$4.4 billion and the National Health Services Corps was also expanded to add 400 clinicians to the 8,000 already serving around the country. Medicare is expected to cost \$491 billion next year, after a saving \$722 million by eliminating waste, fraud and abuse. States would receive \$290 billion in Medicaid and CHIP payments.

President Obama's proposed three-year freeze on most non-defense programs in the budget spared most of the health programs at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Read more about the President's budget proposals: www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2011/assets/health.pdf.



Weekly Update

February 5, 2010

Thank you to all of you who emailed us to let us know what you've been up to. Your e-mails provide the content for the "Physicians Making a Difference" section.

Thank you, also, for your feedback. Let us know how we can improve this newsletter. Remember, you can share this newsletter via facebook, twitter, or linkedIn. You can also download this newsletter as a PDF.

Sincerely,

The Doctors for America Team