

Dear colleagues,

What a week it's been in the fight for health reform. The afterglow of successful House passage of reform legislation has given way to intense debate over a range of issues in the Senate. With a shrinking window of opportunity and shifting public opinion of the current proposals, the debate in Washington only promises to grow even more intense.

Within that vigorous debate, however, a new voice has emerged - one of reason, passion, intellect and hope, guided by evidence and driven by a compulsion to serve. That voice is louder than ever before - and it is being heard by pundits, policymakers and the American people alike. That voice: yours - the voice of physicians and medical students around the nation who have lent their ears, hands and feet to this cause. Your efforts continue to generate a significant impact, even at this writing.

Consider that this week. Feel proud. Then, get ready - for the best is only yet to come.

Physicians Making A Difference:

Highlights from the last week

- Dr. Sarah Smithson (MA) organized a "Beers and Buttons party" in Boston where 40 people made buttons for health reform and signed the public option letter.
- Drs. Mona Mangat (FL) and Sultan Rahman (FL) met with Senator Ben Nelson (D-FL) in Washington, DC.
- Dr. Sonia Vishin (AL) spoke about health reform at grand rounds at the University of Alabama - Birmingham. Her topic was physicians and health reform.
- Carol Duh (TN) recruited 20 med students for Doctors for America at the Medical Students for Choice conference in Salt Lake City.
- Dr. Mahesh Allam (FL) published an op-ed in [The Ledger](#) about the excesses of Medicare Advantage.
- Dr. John Ly (CA) made 200 buttons for health reform last weekend.
- Drs. Catherine Crosland (DC), Krishnan Narasimhan (MD), Charlie Preston (MD), and Zee Beams (MD) attended a rally with Senator Reid to unveil the Senate bill.
- Dr. Nathan Bahr (MN) published an op-ed in [Minnesota Medicine](#) about the importance of physician involvement in health reform.
- Dr. Jeff Smith (CT) attended the Interfaith Rally for health care in Senator Joe Lieberman's neighborhood to tell him that CT residents support health reform.
- Dr. Tom Ellison (AL) spoke at grand rounds at Brookwood Medical Center in Birmingham, Alabama.

Key Policy Developments

1. Health Reform Bill Passes House

The House of Representatives passed the Medicare Payment Reform Act yesterday by a vote of 243-183. The measure is a permanent reform of the sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula costing \$210 billion.

In the past the SGR formula was only patched one year to the next - making the problem worse each subsequent year - and leaving physicians to face a 21% pay cut this January. HR 3961 repeals the impending SGR cuts for 2010, wipe away the accumulated SGR deficit, take steps to replace the formula with a more stable payment system and allow spending on physician services to adapt better to growth in GDP. Attached to the bill is also a "pay-go" legislation requiring offsets to all new entitlement spending or tax cuts (excluding the SGR fix).

The Senate tried, and failed on a procedural vote, to pass permanent SGR reform. Thus, moving forward, it is unclear how the SGR formula problem and the impending physician payment cut will be resolved. The conflicting House and Senate sets up the likelihood that Congress once again will be forced to approve a stopgap measure - an SGR "patch" - to protect physicians from the steep cuts due in January.

2. Senate Bill Unveiled

On Wednesday evening, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) unveiled his merger of the Senate's competing health reform proposals - all 2,074 pages of it.

The Senate's "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act" imposes new regulations on insurers, extends coverage to 31 million people and reduces the federal budget deficit. The legislation does include a government-run insurance plan, or public option, with a provision allowing states to opt out. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) assigned the legislation a price tag of \$849 billion over 10 years, also noting that the bill will reduce the federal deficit by \$127 billion during that time.



Weekly Update

November 20, 2009

- Dr. Arthur L. Yeager (NJ) published a letter to the editor in the [Newark Star Ledger](#) about the large administrative costs in private insurance.

- Drs. Katherine Schierman and Boyd Shook (OK) organized a [panel](#) in Oklahoma City where they spoke to the public about health reform.

- Drs. Michael Devereaux, Arthur Lavin, John Glazer, Neil G. Greenspan, Karl Hess, Teresa Kammerman, Patricia Kellner, Jerome Liebman, Constance Magoulias, Beno Michel, and John Seager (OH) met with their member of Congress to discuss how reform could help physicians better care for patients.

Top 3 Stories

- NEJM - [The Consequence of "No"](#)

- Slate - [Health Reform and Medicare](#)

- Washington Post - [Parsing the Mammogram Guidelines](#)

What you can do this week

Stand with Doctors and the Public

Ask your family and friends to join doctors in supporting the public option - have them sign our open letter to the Senate: http://drsforamerica.org/public_option. Thanks to you, we passed our goal of 2,000 signatories. Now, we need your help to strengthen this coalition of doctors and community members. Our new goal is 4,000 signatures!

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.

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](#) or listen to it via [iTunes](#).

Sincerely,
Ali Khan and the Doctors for America Team

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Doctors for America is a grassroots group of over 15,000 physicians and medical students in all 50 states. Together we are committed to building a health system that works better for us and better for our patients. Learn more at www.drsoforamerica.org.

Among the differences between the Senate and House bills, the Senate proposal finances health reform by increasing the Medicare payroll tax on the wealthy - individuals earning more than \$200,000 and families making over \$250,000 per year. The bill retains the proposed excise tax on high-cost "Cadillac" health plans offered by employers, but would apply only to individual insurance policies costing more than \$8,500 and family plans costing more than \$23,000.

The bill must now clear a preliminary procedural vote to begin debate on the proposal. Senator Reid has scheduled that vote for Saturday, evening allowing senators to leave the District for a week-long Thanksgiving holiday; Sen. Reid is expected to rally the 60 votes from his Democratic caucus to advance the legislation to floor debate.

3. Cost Containment in Focus

Critics of the legislation currently being debated in Congress portend that the reform bills do too little to substantively lower health care costs for the average American. Members of this camp point to policy reforms from the academic literature – such as an Independent Medicare Advisory Commission (IMAC) and more emphasis on delivery system changes – that could drive cost containment but are absent from the House language.

The Senate bill does add two new cost containment mechanisms into the debate to tackle the cost problem head on - the "Cadillac tax" on high-cost insurance coverage and an empowered Medicare Advisory Commission. As the Senate prepares to consider its version of health reform legislation, look for more to develop on the cost containment front. Why? Simple: with one out of every six dollars in the U.S. economy spent on health care, the debate is too big to ignore – and unlikely to disappear anytime soon.