This Week in Health Reform…

• Senate Finance Approves Bill
• Health Insurance Lobby Attacks Reform
• Physician Supply & Demand
Finance Committee Approves Healthcare Reform Bill

Senate Finance Committee passed the *America’s Healthy Future Act* on Tuesday, October 13, with a 14-9 vote. All Democrats voted for the bill, as well as Republican Senator Olympia Snowe, whose vote has been courted for months now by Democratic leaders. Her vote makes the Senate Finance bill the only bipartisan bill to come out of the 5 committees with health care jurisdiction.

The passage of the bill opens the way for the Senate leadership to begin to meld the Finance and HELP bills into a single bill. The HELP bill contains several provisions not included in the Finance bill, notably the “public option” which NMA has supported.

*America’s Healthy Future Act*, which is estimated to cost $829 billion over 10 years, establishes:

- State-based health insurance exchanges
- Medicaid expansion to 133% of federal poverty level (FPL)
- Premium credits to individuals and families between 133-400% FPL

Image Source: Kaiser Health News
On Monday, October 12, America’s Health Insurance Plans, a lobby for the health insurance industry, released a report claiming that legislation will drive up the cost of premiums. The move by the insurance industry came on the eve of the Senate Finance vote.

- The AHIP report concluded that legislation would increase the cost of family coverage by $1,700 a year by 2013 and the cost of individual coverage by $600 a year by 2013.

Spokespeople for the White House and Senator Baucus call the AHIP report deeply flawed.
Reforming the nation’s health system and expanding health insurance coverage to millions of Americans raises the question of whether physician supply can handle the demand. The Association of American Medical Colleges published a report in 2008 that projects a physician shortage of nearly 160,000 physicians by 2025.

The bills in the House and Senate establish provisions that would -

• redistribute nearly 1,000 unfilled residency positions to teaching hospitals that create more residencies in primary care.

• increase funding to the National Health Services Corps, a program that assists physicians in repaying loans in exchange for practicing in a federally designated physician shortage area.

What You Can Do

- Contact the following members of Senate Finance to thank them for their support of the health reform bill - Sen. Snowe (R – Maine), especially; as well as Sen. Carper (D – Delaware), Sen. Lincoln (D – Arkansas), and Sen. Wyden (D – Oregon).

- Write an op-ed and submit it to your local newspapers especially those in Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, and Nebraska where there are senators that will need coaxing when the health bill reaches the Senate floor.

- Continue to share your experiences and feedback by sending an email to healthpolicy@nmanet.org

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