

President Goes to Capitol Hill on Sunday to Advocate for Health Reform Bill

Yesterday (December 6th), President Obama went to Capitol Hill to meet with Senate Democrats and encourage efforts to set differences aside and enact a comprehensive health reform bill. The message from the President was that not since the enactment of social security has the Congress had an opportunity to help so many people.

Peter Orszag, the Director of the Office of Management & Budget, continues to identify four critical pillars of health care reform from the perspective of the Obama Administration:

1. deficit neutrality;
2. an excise tax on high-cost plans;
3. a Medicare commission; and
4. delivery system reforms.

But, there are still difficult issues for the Democrats to work out amongst themselves, as it looks increasingly unlikely that any Republicans will support the bill (although Senators Snowe and Collins remain the most likely supporters if any Republican does cross over). The two issues proving to be the most difficult to resolve are funding for abortion and the so-called "public option."

Three moderate Senators, including Senator Susan Collins, released on Friday a package of amendments that would reward Medicare patients for choosing physicians judged to be efficient, require insurance companies to make public more information about claims denials, and speed up payment reform programs. The amendments would also double the existing penalties for hospitals with high infection rates. Hospitals have expressed concern over some aspects of the amendments.

The House has already enacted its bill. If the Senate passes its bill, the two bills would be reconciled in a conference committee with a final vote then taking place in each body before a bill could be sent to the President. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) is still hoping to have a bill on the President's desk by Christmas, but that is looking increasingly unlikely.

On this coming Thursday, MMA representatives will be meeting with Senators Snowe and Collins. Our message will be to keep working, look for areas of common interest, and try to improve on the *status quo*. The MMA also will emphasize the need to permanently repeal the sustainable growth rate formula, as without some change, Medicare payment rates for physicians will be reduced by 21% on January 1, 2010.

The AMA has many health system reform resources on its web site at: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/health-system-reform/resources.shtml> .

You may be particularly interested in the AMA's letter to Senate Majority Leader Reid dated December 1, 2009 pointing out provisions of the Senate bill supported and those opposed by the AMA. Also, please note a document entitled, H.R. 3962 and H.R. 3590, *Health System Reform Legislative Summary Chart of Major Provisions* dated December 2, 2009.