

## **Health Care Reform Discussions Continue at Brisk Pace in Washington, D.C.**

Last week, President Obama's rhetoric on health care reform suggested that there are "no excuses" for not proceeding with action on health care reform this year. DHHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced the HHS Office of Health Reform, directed by Jeanne Lambrew, to coordinate with the White House Office of Health Reform. House Democrats told the President that they would approve health care reform legislation by the August recess. Two key committees, the House Energy & Commerce Committee and the Senate Finance Committee have been meeting regularly to consider various options for health care reform, including the possibility of a public plan, an individual mandate, an employer mandate or "play or pay," and funding options, including the elimination of the tax deduction for employer-sponsored health insurance, something Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) said is unlikely. Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, a member of the Finance Committee, publicly expressed her concern about the elimination of the tax deduction, particularly because of the high cost of health insurance coverage in Maine.