

## **Continuing Update on Health System Reform; Congress Now in Recess**

The U.S. Senate adjourned for its August recess last Friday, a week after the House so all four members of Maine's Congressional delegation are home. While they have a busy schedule of public events, none are planning public events specifically tailored to soliciting comments on the health care reform debate. Recent news reports have covered some hostile exchanges between supporters and opponents of aspects of health care reform at such events in other states.

The bipartisan subcommittee of the Senate Finance Committee known as the "Gang of Six" may continue their deliberations by conference call or in person during the August break as they hope to have some consensus by mid-September. Both of Maine's moderate Republican Senators will be key votes in the final debate and Senator Snowe is deeply immersed in it as a member of the "Gang of Six." In addition to the Finance Committee Chair, Max Baucus (D-MT), and Ranking Republican, Chuck Grassley (R-IA), the other members of the "Gang" are Michael Enzi (R-WY), Kent Conrad (D-ND), and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM).

Despite opposition from some provider groups and 75 House members who signed a letter of opposition to Speaker Pelosi last week, the Finance Committee leans towards creation of a *Medicare Preservation Commission* that would establish Medicare payment policy that could be changed only by Congress. The "Gang" also continues to discuss a Medicaid expansion aspect of its package and the potential impact on cash-strapped states. Regarding the various financing options on the table, the group continues to spend time on a tax on high-end or "Cadillac" insurance policies.

President Obama met with members of the Finance Committee on August 6th and encouraged them to keep working on the issues. Senate Democratic leaders have suggested that they may try to pass a bill through the budget reconciliation process if the Finance Committee doesn't reach agreement by September 15th.

You can follow the health care reform debate on the AMA's web site at: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/advocacy/health-system-reform.shtml>.