

Update on Health System Reform; MMA Activities Accelerate

Last week proved to be a busy one in the very public effort to lobby the Congress to pass comprehensive health system reform. Among the highlights:

- President Obama signaled Sunday that he may be ready to abandon the idea of giving Americans the option of a "public plan" as part of any new health care system.
- President Obama appeared at a health care forum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and acknowledged the critical role of Maine's Senior Senator Olympia Snowe in the health care reform debate. Senator Snowe is a member of the Senate Finance Committee's "gang of six" - three Republicans and three Democrats selected by committee chairman Max Baucus, D-Montana, and ranking Republican Charles Grassley of Iowa. Many observers believe that it is the group of six who hold the key to enactment of a bill, as Senate Democrats are likely to need at least a couple Republican votes in order to avoid a potential Republican filibuster. The six Senators continue to meet over the August recess and are still hoping to have a draft bill agreed to by Sept. 15.
- In lieu of a "public option", a network of private, nonprofit cooperatives is gaining support.

In Maine, Families USA released a study claiming that family health insurance premiums grew more than four times faster than income in Maine over the past decades. Health insurance premiums rose by 101 percent compared to a 22 percent increase for median income from 2000 to 2009. The average annual family health insurance premium rose from \$6,915 to \$13,927 over the ten-year period.

MMA's health system reform activities this past week included an op ed piece written by MMA Executive Committee chair Jo Linder, M.D. and published in the Maine Sunday Telegram. Dr. Linder noted her disappointment in the deteriorating tone of the debate and encouraged readers to communicate with public critics, asking the question, "What is their solution?"

On August 28, MMA President Stephanie Lash, M.D. will participate in a provider forum organized by Maine's Second District Congressman Mike Michaud. The forum will be held in Bangor and participation is by invitation only. About twenty-five organizations are expected to participate.

Tomorrow, MMA will assist the AMA by sending a message from the AMA to the physicians in Maine. As there is a lot of misunderstanding in both the public and provider community, it was felt important to clarify the AMA's position.

Visit the MMA website at www.mainemed.com for the latest developments in the health care reform debate.