

September 2009

The Latest on the Healthcare Reform Debate

After Labor Day, Congress went back into session and most discussions have revolved around healthcare reform. The House, which has voted on a healthcare reform bill in three separate committees (Ways & Means, Education & Labor, and Energy & Commerce) is waiting for the Senate to merge its two bills - one from the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) and the other from the Finance Committee – before they vote on a single piece of legislation. The House is waiting to read the Senate’s final bill in hopes of seeing if the “public option” section will be included.

At the end of the summer, the Senate HELP Committee passed its healthcare reform bill and in the last weeks of September the Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) debated amendments to its version of a healthcare reform bill. There were over 400 amendments and the committee sat in session for nine days as Senators discussed their ideas. On October 1, the committee finished its work, adjourned for the weekend, and returned in hopes of a vote. However, final discussions are being held in abeyance while the Congressional Budget Office estimates the cost of any new program added through the amendment process. All sides are committed to keeping the bill “budget neutral,” that is, not allowing any new program to add to the deficit and for each to be fully paid through alternative revenue mechanisms, before being accepted into the bill.

To view a side-by-side comparison of the Senate and House bills click [here](#).

The latest version of the Finance Committee’s bill can be found at http://finance.senate.gov/sitepages/leg/LEG%202009/100209_Americas_Healthy_Future_Act_AMENDED.pdf

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) has already started to harmonize both Senate bills, even as the White House is meeting with senators to help ensure passage. In a pivotal role, Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) will, potentially, play the part of bridge builder to moderate Republicans in hopes of creating a bi-partisan piece of legislation.

Once both chambers pass its version of the bill and they will conference to hammer out the final compromise legislation.

AACAP is encouraging members of Congress to continue the healthcare debate. We are working with both the House and the Senate to ensure that incentives for increased mental health workforce, physician reimbursement increases, and incentives for collaborative care are included in the legislation. We are also watching to ensure children with mental illness do not lose the coverage they already have, and that mental health parity is required in small group and non-group markets. To view AACAP’s Healthcare Reform Principles [click here](#)

The coming weeks are vital to our success! Please keep an eye out for Legislative Alerts, which will require a strong showing from our grassroots support.

Thank you for your advocacy! If you have any questions, please let us know.

Kristin Kroeger Ptakowski, Director of Government Affairs & Clinical Practice (kkroeger@aacap.org)

Alec Stone, Assistant Director, Federal Affairs (astone@aacap.org)

Kevin Jones, Assistant Director for State Advocacy (kjones@aacap.org)