

Historic votes come on health care reform

This is an update from the WEAC Health Care Reform Work Team. To respond to this message and e-mail members of the team, please reply to healthcare@weac.org.

The following is a summary from NEA of the congressional activity over the past week as well as the update on health care reform activities from Health Care for America Now (HCAN), one of NEA's main health care reform coalition partners.

Congress and President Obama have turned up the heat on health care reform. The president has asked both the Senate and House to pass health care bills before the August recess. NEA continues to work non-stop in our efforts to ensure access to quality, affordable health care coverage for all, no change to the exclusion of employer provided health care benefits from taxation and a government-sponsored public health insurance plan option on day one. These are NEA's key messages for health care reform.

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee. Under the leadership of Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT), the Senate HELP Committee voted on July 15 to pass its bill. The Senate HELP bill includes an employer play-or-pay mandate, state-based health insurance exchanges that would include a public health insurance plan option, an individual mandate and insurance market reforms (such as prohibiting pre-existing condition exclusions). It would also provide assistance to employers with retiree health care costs and give income-based subsidies to individuals. In addition, the HELP bill includes a provision that would allow employers to increase the value of wellness incentives to encourage employees to improve their health status. The HELP Committee's bill will be merged with the Senate Finance Committee proposal that is currently being drafted. Then it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

Senate Finance Committee. Senate Finance Chair Max Baucus (D-MT) has been working with committee members on a bipartisan bill with specific revenue provisions, including tax increases and Medicare and Medicaid savings, in order to cover the cost of the bill. A number of financing options have been discussed, such as capping or limiting the current tax exclusion of employer provider health care benefits, taxing the very wealthy as well as new limits on contributions to health savings accounts and flexible spending accounts. In addition, alternatives to a public health insurance option, such as a state-based health insurance cooperative, have also been discussed. Senator Baucus has indicated that opposition by the president and Democratic leaders to changing the tax exclusion for employer-provided health coverage has slowed the progress of the Senate Finance bill.

House Committees. In the House, three committees working on health care reform, Ways and Means, Education and Labor, and Energy and Commerce, released a bill on July 14. The House bill would be paid for by reducing costs within the Medicare and Medicaid system and taxing the wealthy. It would require individuals to buy and employers to provide coverage. It would create a government-sponsored public health plan option through health insurance exchanges. Ways and Means passed its version out of Committee on July 17 with all Republicans and the following three Democrats voting against it:

- **Earl Pomeroy (ND)**
- **Ron Kind (WI)**
- **John Tanner (TN)**

The version passed out of the Education and Labor Committee added COBRA extensions and allowed waivers to states to implement single-payer systems. The Democratic no votes were as follows:

- **Jason Altmire (PA)**
- **Dana Titus (NV)**
- **Jared Polis (CO)**

The House Energy and Commerce Committee is expected to encounter some major disagreement over passage of their bill, as several conservative Democrats want to see a limited public health insurance plan option, more cost containment and assistance for small employers. Chairman Henry Waxman is hoping to finish the bill by the end of this week, but that does not look likely. In the meantime, NEA will be sending additional information to states affiliates on ways in which we can reach out to all of the Energy and Commerce members and in particular, the following members:

- **Bart Gordon (TN)**
- **Anna Eshoo (CA)**
- **Bart Stupak (MI)**
- **Charlie Melancon (LA)**
- **John Barrow (GA)**
- **Baron Hill (IN)**
- **Jim Matheson (UT)**
- **Mike Ross (AR)**
- **Zack Space (OH)**
- **Bruce Braley (IA)**
- **Rick Boucher (VA)**
- **Jay Inslee (WA)**

Also, below you will find the update from Health Care for America Now! for the week ending July 17, 2009. It includes information on the House Ways and Means and Education and Labor committees passing health reform bills last week, a rally for health care reform in Maine, health care reform ads running in nine states and a link to an editorial on health care reform:

Hello Health Care for America Now Partners,

If you have been reading newspapers or watching cable news lately, the coverage might make it seem that health care reform is "on the ropes." Headline after headline talks about "bipartisan gridlock" or "stalled progress." **The truth is we made history last week when a progressive health care bill passed the two committees in the House.**

Despite the cynical rhetoric about horse race politics, we are closer to real health care reform than we have ever been before. No matter what the spin is here inside the beltway of DC, the

only way to win this fight is with your work on the ground keeping our members' of Congress feet to the fire. Health care can't wait!

- "Don't be on the Wrong Side of History" - Make Sure Members of Congress know what is at stake
- Historic: Ways and Means and Education and Labor pass a health reform bill in the House
- Ads Airing in 9 States Say Support Health Care Reform Now
- From our Partners: Hundreds Rally in Maine for Health Care Reform

"Don't be on the Wrong Side of History" - Make Sure Members of Congress know what is at stake

[Bob Creamer wrote an editorial for the Huffington Post](#) that every Member of Congress should read. Here's an excerpt and link to the whole article. Feel free to send this along to your Representative or Senator:

Every major social advance is surrounded by controversy and conflict. That's because every time there is change in the status quo there are winners and losers. The controversy over President Obama's health care reform does not center mainly on "differences in approach" or academic disagreements over the way that health care systems should be designed in some ideal world. They center instead on battles over wealth and power - just as they did when the Congress created Social Security or Medicare, or passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

...

Members of Congress can't avoid the controversy. If they want to, they should look for another line of work. All they can do is hope to be on the right side of history - to take positions that their grandchildren will brag about after they are long gone.

Read the [full post](#).

Historic: Ways and Means and Education and Labor pass a health reform bill in the House

Both the Ways and Means Committee and the Education and Labor Committee in the House have passed the America's Affordable Health Choices Act, the House's health reform bill.

We have now officially made it further than Bill Clinton did in the 1990s. With this and with the passage of the Senate H.E.L.P. (Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions) committee bill, it's historic. Read our statements on the passage of the [House bill](#) and the [H.E.L.P. bill](#).

Don't forget to call your senators and representatives who voted the right way on these bills to thank them. [Click here to call and view 'yes' votes in each committee](#).

Ads Airing in 9 States Say Support Health Care Reform Now

With health care reform bills moving in both the House and Senate, HCAN and AFSCME launched an \$800,000 television advertising campaign that asks members of Congress and senators in nine states to support legislation that will lower costs, expand coverage, and keep the insurance companies honest. The ads support legislation that would allow people to keep the insurance they have now or choose from a range of plans, including a new public health insurance option.

Watch the TV ads here: HealthCareforAmericaNow.org/ActNow

From our Partners: Hundreds Rally in Maine for Health Care Reform

The HCAN partners in Maine did a great job this weekend organizing the largest health care rally in Maine's history. At the event Sen. Snowe made the strongest commitment to the public health insurance plan yet. At the event she had a local town council member read a statement on her behalf, saying, "I believe that the reforms we are creating will result in more competitive, affordable and innovative options for Mainers, yet we can all agree that we must not leave universal access to chance. That is why I also support a public plan which must be available from day one."

From the *Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram* - [Health-care reform rally draws about 500 people](#)

For more information about WEAC's Health Care team, visit www.weac.org/healthcare.