



APHA Legislative Update March 2010

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I. President Calls for Swift Action on Health Reform After Bipartisan Meeting

On Wednesday, March 3, President Obama called on Congress to pass final health reform bill and send it to him for his signature in the "next few weeks." During his remarks the president acknowledged that Republicans were not likely to support his call to action. He rejected calls from some Republican in Congress to scrap the current proposals and start from scratch, thus signaling support for Democrats to use a procedural move know as "reconciliation," which would allow the Senate to pass the proposal by a simple majority instead of the filibuster-proof 60 vote majority they have had to employ for several previous health reform-related votes.

The bipartisan day-long meeting on health reform hosted by the president on February 25 gave the public a chance to hear from both parties in both Houses of Congress about their positions on the president's new proposal and the proposals that passed the House and Senate last year. While there appeared to be little progress on coming to a bipartisan consensus on health reform legislation, President Obama issued a letter to House and Senate leaders identifying potential areas of common ground as well as major differences between the parties. Specifically, the letter highlighted four proposals from Republicans at the meeting that the president is interested in exploring. You can read the entire letter at: www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/B690B88A-611A-473B-96EC-414D61A280CD/0/ObamalettertoHillpostsummit.pdf.

Given the president's remarks this afternoon, it is most likely that Democrats will try to move forward, assuming little to no Republican support for their proposals, using the reconciliation process.

The health reform legislation used in this process would likely closely resemble the health reform proposal released by President Obama shortly before the bipartisan meeting (see link below). One scenario being discussed would have the House pass the Senate bill with a guarantee in the form of a letter from 51 Senate Democrats assuring the House that the Senate would make agreed-upon fixes to its original legislation.

The final product would likely be a proposal that closely follows the bill passed by the Senate with some tweaks aimed at gaining support from House liberals and as well as some Republican supported provisions.

A full summary of the president's proposal can be viewed at: www.whitehouse.gov/health-care-meeting/proposal.

You can read APHA's press release on the bipartisan meeting at: www.apha.org/about/news/pressreleases/2010/healthreformsummitrls.htm.

A recent letter sent to the U.S. Congress by APHA and 35 state and regional public health associations urging Congress to complete its work on health reform legislation at: www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/F27721D7-7109-4DC8-8B36-1B456582675B/0/APHAAffiliateHRletterfinal.pdf.

II. Health Groups Oppose Effort to Overturn EPA Greenhouse Gas Ruling

Lead by APHA, twelve health organizations joined together in sending a letter to all members of the United States Senate urging Senators to oppose a Resolution of Disapproval that has been introduced by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) that would overturn the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) December 7, 2009 final endangerment finding on greenhouse gases. The endangerment finding which relates to six key greenhouse gases which contribute to climate change – carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride in the atmosphere – finds that current and future concentrations of these gases threaten the public health and welfare of Americans. The health effects of climate change include: increased likelihood of more frequent and intense heat waves, more wildfires, degraded air quality, more flooding, increased drought, more intense storms, harm to water resources and harm to agriculture. An April 2007 Supreme Court decision required EPA to make a determination of whether there was compelling scientific evidence that greenhouse gases threatened public health and welfare. The resolution introduced by Senator Murkowski would effectively block the EPA from regulating greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act.

You can view the letter spearheaded by APHA at: www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/1AD4D22E-5D35-403E-AE53-DC234C1E6292/0/UpdatedhealthltroproposingMurkowskiGHGRes.pdf.

You can view APHA's press release regarding the letter at: www.apha.org/about/news/pressreleases/2010/epagreenhousegasrelease.htm.

III. Senate Looks Likely to Take on Food Safety Legislation

During an agriculture appropriations subcommittee hearing on Tuesday, March 2, Senator Harkin (D-Iowa) predicted that food safety legislation would be "on the President's desk by May."

The House of Representatives acted quickly on the need for food safety reform by passing the Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009 (H.R. 2749) last summer. While the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (S. 510) was passed out of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, which Senate Harkin chairs, in November, it has yet to come to a floor vote.

Senator Harkin indicated that S. 510 would make it to the floor either by the end of March or soon after the Senate returns from the Easter/Passover recess.

Join APHA and the Make Our Food Safe Coalition's efforts to move the FDA Food Safety Modernization to the floor for a full Senate vote by [sending this letter](#) to your Senators.

APHA's latest Food Safety Issue Brief is available at:
www.apha.org/advocacy/reports/reports/.

The Make Our Food Safe Coalitions has additional resources available at:
www.makeourfoodsafes.org/.

IV. New APHA Policy Proposals and Policies Online for Review

Twenty-one new proposals for APHA's 2010 policy process have been received and have been posted on the association's website for member comment. All members are encouraged to work with their Sections and other units to provide comprehensive comments on policies of interest. In addition, the policies that will be reviewed by the membership for possible archiving have been posted on the website. You can view both the new proposals and those up for review this year at: www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/. Members should use the appropriate comment forms for comments on both new policies and policies up for review which are also available on the APHA website.

V. Policy Watch: Public Health News From the States

New York City Introduces New Health Initiative Aimed at Reducing Sodium Intake

Earlier this year, the New York City's Bloomberg administration, unveiled an initiative aimed at encouraging food manufacturers and restaurant chains to reduce the amount of salt in their products. The five year plan sets a goal of reducing the amount of salt in packaged and restaurant food by 25 percent. Reduction of sodium in packaged and restaurant food would reduce the incidence of high blood pressure and would help prevent strokes and heart attacks. The plan is currently voluntary for food companies, allowing companies to cut salt gradually over the next five years. For more information about the initiative, visit the New York City Health Department website at:

www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cardio/cardio-salt-initiative.shtml. In 2002 APHA adopted policy supporting the reduction of sodium in the diet which can be viewed at:
www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/policysearch/default.htm?id=278.

Legislative Update Conference Call

Join APHA's Government Relations staff for a conference call to review the February Legislative Update. The call will be held on Monday, March 8, 2010 at 1:00pm (EST). Call (800) 442-5794; Passcode is 141930. Any problems with the call-in number should be directed to customer service at (877) 807-0970.

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