

The Update is taking a Holiday break. There will be no Update on December 29, 2006. Merry Holidays and Happy New Year from all of us at VOR!

GIVE THE GIFT OF VOR THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!!!

A donation in someone's honor makes a perfect Holiday gift, or give the gift of VOR membership. Use the form at the end of this weekly update or contact Tony Padgett, VOR's Director of Resource Development at anthonypadgett@sbcglobal.net, or 847-253-6020 with any questions. Thank you for your support and HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!!

VOR Weekly E-Mail Update December 22, 2006

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- 1. Congress Partially Fills CHIP Shortfall
- 2. Poll Examines Public's Health Care Priorities for the New Congress and 2008 Presidential Candidates

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FOCUS ON ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND RELATED SERVICES

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- 1. Congress Partially Fills CHIP Shortfall

From Families USA:

Over the December 9th weekend, the 109th Congress wrapped up its work by taking steps to partially fill next year's State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) shortfall. Although Congress was unable to fill the SCHIP hole as completely as we might wish, the agreement worked out and included in the tax bill does make good progress.

The bill would redistribute SCHIP money from FY 2004 (slated to expire) and certain funds from FY 2005 to states that will have shortfalls next year. Fourteen states are expected to have shortfalls next year. And although the redistributed money will not fully meet the shortfall, none of the states will experience shortfalls before May of next year. (This means Congress could take action early next year to do more to plug the shortfall hole.)

The bill also puts certain limitations on the redistributed money. Shortfall states that had expanded their program beyond children and pregnant women would qualify only for the Medicaid match - not the full SCHIP match - with their new funds.

Other items included in the tax bill:

On its way out the door, Congress slipped some technical fixes to last year's Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) in the final bill. We'll send around another e-mail with more detail. Congress also

expanded Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) by raising the contribution amount. (See CBPP paper: <http://www.cbpp.org/9-26-06health2.htm>)

2. Poll Examines Public's Health Care Priorities for the New Congress and 2008 Presidential Candidates

Kaiser Family Foundation December 05, 2006

Summary: A new poll finds broad support among Democrats, Independents, and Republicans for drug price negotiation, re-importation, and prioritizing children for coverage of the uninsured. Views on stem cells more mixed. Public sees health care prices as unreasonable and wants government to take steps to lower them. Iraq by far remains the public's top priority for the new Congress and Presidential campaign, with the economy and health care next but well behind.

A new national survey finds widespread support across the political spectrum for a number of health initiatives likely to be taken up by the new Congress, as well as a widely-held view that government should do more to address the high cost of health care. At the same time, the war in Iraq continues to play a dominant role among the public's priorities, with economic and health concerns following distantly.

The poll, conducted November 9-19 by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health, included a nationally representative sample of 1,867 adults. The survey looks at the public's priorities and views on health issues as a new Democratic majority takes the leadership of Congress and as the 2008 presidential campaign begins to take shape. It focuses, in particular, on differences and similarities among Democrats, Republicans, and those who identify themselves as Independents or something else.

The Congressional Agenda and the Public's Priorities

While there is debate in Washington about whether and how to do it, substantial majorities of Democrats (92%), Independents (85%), and Republicans (74%) support allowing the government to negotiate drug prices under Medicare (85% overall, including 65% strongly and 20% somewhat favoring it). There is also widespread support for permitting Americans to buy lower-priced prescription drugs from Canada (79%, including 55% strongly and 24% somewhat). Eight in 10 people believe drug price negotiation will make medications more affordable, while 31% believe it will result in less research and development by U.S. drug companies.

"Many of the health policy proposals currently on the congressional agenda are broadly popular with the public, from drug price negotiation to reimportation to children's health insurance," said Drew Altman, president and CEO of the Kaiser Family Foundation. "Health care is well positioned to emerge as a top national issue in 2008 and beyond, but only if the situation in Iraq stabilizes and presidential candidates spark a national discussion about health reform."

More than half of Americans support broader federal funding for stem cell research, though with sharp partisan divisions: 67% of Democrats and 61% of Independents favor it, compared to 37% of Republicans. The public in general favors greater government support for medical research. When asked to pick a public health priority, 67% chose increased spending to develop treatment and cures for diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, compared to 14% who pointed to prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and 13% who said better preparation for public health threats like avian flu.

Overall, Iraq by far tops the list of policy priorities for the public, with 46% naming it as one of the two issues they would most like the president and Congress to act on next year. Health care and the economy came next but followed far back at 15% each.

When asked to pick their top health care priority, most people point either to expanding coverage for the uninsured (35%) or reducing health care costs (30%). Fewer (18%) choose improving the Medicare drug benefit. And, while policymakers struggle with the budget deficit, few people (6%) rank reducing spending on government health programs as their top priority. But partisan differences emerge on priorities, with Democrats placing a much higher priority on expanding coverage, Republicans emphasizing reducing costs, and Independents split.

The public is most likely to prioritize coverage for children over other groups of the uninsured if Congress judges that guaranteed health insurance for everyone is not affordable, an issue likely to arise with reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program on the horizon.

Looking Ahead: The Broader Health Reform Debate and the Beginning of the Presidential Campaign

What the public would like to hear from presidential candidates largely mirrors the priorities for the new Congress, with the war in Iraq mostly pushing aside other issues at this point. Among health care issues, the public cites the twin issues of coverage and costs as top priorities, with similar partisan splits as for the congressional agenda. Medicare's drug benefit remains of lesser concern.

Democrats, in particular, say they are looking for more far-reaching proposals from candidates - 73% say they would like to see a health proposal from a candidate that makes a major effort to provide near universal coverage even with a substantial increase in spending, compared to 18% who would prefer a more limited plan and 7% who prefer a plan that maintains the status quo. Far fewer, though still a majority (55%), of Independents would like to see a major plan proposed, along with 37% of Republicans.

"The public shows some appetite for the kind of broader health measures that have largely been absent from the agenda for many years, but that interest could wane in a full-fledged debate when critics mount opposition campaigns or if people come to believe that a plan would threaten their own medical arrangements," said Mollyann Brodie, vice president and director of Public Opinion and Media Research for Kaiser.

The poll also finds a strong desire among the public for initiatives to address health care costs.

With previous polls showing health care affordability topping the list of personal worries for Americans, it is not surprising that substantial majorities see health care prices as unreasonable compared with other goods and services, including hospital charges (86%), brand name drugs (83%), health insurance premiums (70%), nursing home charges (63%), and physician fees (59%). But the public does discriminate - just 20% see the prices of generic drugs as unreasonably high.

Perhaps more unexpected is that almost two-thirds (64%) of the public believes government can do a lot to address the cost of health care, and people across the political spectrum believe government should try to address health care prices - 65% of Republicans, 74% of Independents, and 86% of Democrats, among the large majorities who say any health-related prices are unreasonable.

"These findings suggest that we are likely to see more public pressure on Congress to address the health care cost issue in the years ahead," said Robert J. Blendon, professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health and the Kennedy School of Government.

When faced with a choice between the government trying to solve the health care cost problem by dealing directly with providers and insurers and limiting what they can charge versus giving consumers tax incentives to buy high-deductible coverage and encouraging them to shop for lower prices and better quality, most people (59%) choose direct government action over the more market-oriented solution (34%). That was true across the board for Democrats (66%), Independents (58%), and Republicans (52%).

The full survey results, including question wording, are available at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/pomr120806pkg.cfm> . A webcast of a briefing discussing the results and the health priorities for Congress and the Administration also will be available.

Methodology

The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health Survey, The Public's Health Care Agenda for the New Congress and Presidential Campaign, was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard School of Public Health. The Kaiser/Harvard survey research team included Drew E. Altman, Ph.D., Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D., and Claudia Deane, M.A. from the Kaiser Family Foundation; and Professor Robert Blendon, Sc.D., and John Benson, M.A. of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Fieldwork was done by telephone November 9 to 19, 2006 among a nationally representative sample of 1,867 respondents ages 18 and over - including 1,363 respondents who reported voting in the midterm election - by ICR/International Communications Research. The survey included an oversample of respondents ages 65 and over; a total of 718 respondents in this

age group were interviewed. Overall results have been weighted to reflect the actual demographic distribution of the nation.

The margin of sampling error for results based on the full sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on smaller subsets of respondents, the margin of sampling error is somewhat higher. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.

3. Membership and Contribution Form

VOR's efforts year round make all the seasons happier for people with mental retardation! Here is my donation to keep up the good work. Thank you for your support and HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!!

TO JOIN OR CONTRIBUTE: \$25 per individual, \$150 per family organization, or \$200 per provider/professional organization. Extra donations are welcome! You may pay by credit card or check.

Mail the completed form with payment to:

Voice of the Retarded 5005 Newport Drive, Suite 108 Rolling Meadows, IL 60008 phone 847-253-6020 847-253-6054 fax (for referrals or credit card payments) vor@compuserve.com (for referrals or credit card payments)

Name

Address (if paying by credit card, use billing address). All forms must include complete address including zip code)

City St Zip

Phone Fax

E-Mail

Family/Professional Organization Affiliation (if applicable)

VOR now accepts Master Card and Visa. If paying by credit card, please provide the following information:

Amount to charge to card: ___\$1,000 ___\$500 ___\$250 ___\$150 ___\$50 ___\$25
\$_____ Other amount

_____ Master Card _____ Visa

Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Cardholder's Signature: _____