



# *Advocacy*

## ADVISORY

Vol.9 No. 18, October 11, 2009

### *In this edition:*

- Congress Continues Work on Health Reform
- CHRISTUS Participates in Discussions

## SPECIAL EDITION: STATE OF HEALTH CARE REFORM

*THIS ISSUE* of the Advocacy Advisory will focus on the on-going debate and discussion about health care reform at the national level.

### *Putting Care Within Reach:*

As one of the largest Catholic health care systems in the United States and because of our solid reputation among policymakers at all levels of government, CHRISTUS Health is uniquely positioned to lead in the effort to achieve meaningful and significant health care reform for this nation. Our efforts will be targeted at achieving objectives in support of the goal of universal coverage, and will include continuing to build effective relationships with legislators and members of the new Obama administration, equipping CHRISTUS leadership and associates with the tools needed to engage and participate in this important national debate, and working to build consensus and collaboration among other health care providers.

The national political scene promises change in 2009 and early indicators are that it will be a favorable time in which to work to achieve our goals. However, there remain significant challenges that CHRISTUS will work to help overcome as a primary feature of our campaign of “**Putting Care Within Reach.**” Success will require a profound commitment at every level of CHRISTUS Health, as we all work together in our individual communities and on a system-wide basis to promote a message of hope, change, and quality health care for every American.

### *Current Climate and CHRISTUS Position:*

It is clear that health reform currently has the undivided attention of Congress. It is equally clear that the issue is divisive, not just between political parties, but also between regions of the country and providers and patients. CHRISTUS is excited about potential prospects for health care reform and we have been to Washington to express our support for this effort. We believe that the perfect should not be the enemy of the good in order to get a bill passed this year. Unfortunately, there is more attention being given to the differences under discussion, with very little attention to the similarities in all of the packages under consideration.

The CHRISTUS message regarding health care reform legislation includes emphasis on the following:

- **Oversight:** CHRISTUS believes that health providers must be accountable for demonstrating quality of care and cost effective care. Senator Rockefeller (D-WV) has proposed legislation which would expand MedPAC's authority to set payment rates for Medicare providers. And

- some have discussed an Independent Medicare Advisory Committee (IMAC) with authority to look at outcome measures and establish reimbursement systems that are aligned with cost effective care. CHRISTUS believes that the most important part of this discussion is not necessarily giving an entity authority to simply cut reimbursement rates, but giving some entity authority to look at the overall cost drivers in health care and determine what payment systems bring the most accountability for providing high quality care at the least cost. We agree with efforts to assign an agency with responsibility to make providers accountable.
- **Provider Collaboration:** CHRISTUS supports efforts to reduce barriers between physicians and hospitals so that more standardization exists in the provision of care and care is better coordinated among providers. Accountable Care Organizations (ACO's) came up in many of our meetings as one strategy to better coordinate care. The bills also include authority for demonstrations and pilot projects to expand medical homes and pursue similar initiatives.
  - **Quality Measurement:** CHRISTUS reiterated its leadership among health systems to be transparent in terms of the cost and quality of care we provide. We agree with Congress that quality measures should be reported by all providers to ensure that we are accountable for the federal dollars we spend.
  - **Workforce Initiatives:** CHRISTUS understands that an expansion of health coverage will require a workforce to meet the primary care needs of a larger population that previously avoided preventive care. We stand ready to do our part to work with federal agencies to ensure that we get this workforce trained. We are pleased that both the House and Senate are likely to include initiatives to bolster the primary care workforce with provisions to expand primary care residency slots for physicians and to provide incentives for nurses.
  - **Information Technology:** CHRISTUS is working closely with federal policymakers within the Administration to ensure that the "meaningful use" standards under consideration will incentivize hospitals to embrace HIT. We met with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology and shared our experience with HIT, and our belief that HIT will change the way we provide health care, especially by allowing patients to remain in their homes. The funding provided in the last stimulus bill in Congress will be made available to qualifying providers based on their ability to meet these new standards. CHRISTUS stands ready to be a leader in HIT and is eager to be an example for other organizations.

## CONGRESS POISED TO ACT ON HEALTH CARE REFORM

### Senate Finance Committee Vote Slated

A key Senate committee will vote Tuesday on its \$829-billion overhaul of the nation's healthcare system, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said Thursday -- the final hurdle before the full House and Senate can begin their debate on the future of healthcare. In a speech on the Senate floor, Reid (D-NV) criticized Republicans for opposing the finance committee's measure, accusing GOP leaders of aiming to be "partisan protesters" rather than "productive partners." Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) fired back that Democrats had yet to craft a package that could win 60 votes, and that until they did, any claims that the package would dramatically shrink the ranks of the uninsured while lowering the budget deficit were "irrelevant." Reid's announcement came less than a day after congressional budget analysts projected that the measure would achieve both of those aims.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office gave an important boost to the finance committee's work with its report last Wednesday, which indicated that its version is the only one of five bills by various congressional panels that achieves every important goal Obama has set for his top domestic initiative. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said that she would send three versions of her chamber's healthcare bill to the budget office for analysis, bringing the House one step closer to a vote. Pelosi said that all three versions would include a government-sponsored insurance plan -- unlike the Senate finance measure.

<http://www.kff.org/pullingittogether/upload/pit100909largegif.gif>

Source: *The Associated Press*, 10/9/09.

## House Moves Closer to Combined Health Reform Measure Including Tax Plan

House Democrats are close to completing a draft of legislation calling for the broadest expansion of the U.S. health-care system in more than four decades as they consider a range of new taxes to fund the plan. Lawmakers last week scaled back a proposed surtax on the wealthiest Americans, said Representative Sander Levin, a Michigan Democrat. At the same time, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she's considering a levy on health insurers' profits. The bill is likely to require all individuals to get insurance, oblige employers to provide coverage or pay a penalty, and restrict insurance companies' ability to reject applicants. Underscoring divisions among Democrats, the current draft also includes three different versions of a government-run program that would compete with private insurers. "In a very short time, we'll be prepared to pass legislation that does so much for the American people," Pelosi, a California Democrat, told reporters.

To date, three House committees and two Senate panels have dealt with the legislation. House and Senate Democrats are split over the government-run insurance program, whether to require that employers cover workers, and how to pay for the legislation. Party members will battle over those issues in the next few weeks as leaders combine plans and then prepare for the eventual merging of legislation from the two chambers. All the versions have common ground. In addition to requiring that Americans get insurance, they encourage greater use of preventive care, electronic records and research on the effectiveness of treatments. Under all the plans, insurers would have to accept new clients, regardless of pre-existing conditions. House leaders are working to bring the cost of their plan to less than \$900 billion over 10 years. The rival measure set for a vote on October 13 in the Senate Finance Committee would cost \$829 billion.

*Source: The Washington Post, 10/10/09.*

## Women Seen as Crucial to Health Care Reform Debate

The White House and top Democrats, intensifying their push to build support for their party's health overhaul proposals, are increasingly targeting women, a politically crucial group with strong opinions on health care that polls suggest has yet to be sold on the changes. In speeches, news conferences and even an all-female talk-in on the Senate floor last week, Democrats have been pounding away daily on the message that their ideas -- along the lines of what President Obama has called for -- are especially good for women. The campaign reflects a concern among Democrats that women - who typically make most of a family's health care decisions, are not yet on board with the sweeping changes Obama and his congressional allies are advocating.

A recent Associated Press poll found that women, like the public overall, are generally split on the health care legislation. Although younger women -- those under 55 who many opinion experts consider crucial in any health care debate -- slightly favor the proposals, nearly one-third of them are on the fence, saying they are neither supportive nor opposed. A group of female House Democrats led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, were at it again Tuesday at a rally near the steps of the Capitol where Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), led a call-and-response with female attendees of, "Do women need real health reform? Do we want it? Are we willing to fight for it?" The crowd shouted an enthusiastic "Yes!" to each, but women's activists acknowledge that conservative criticism of Democrats' health care ideas -- particularly the charges that it could lead to less choices for patients or reduced benefits for senior citizens -- has had an impact on women, and proponents need to do more to persuade them the proposals are in their interest.

*Source: The Associated Press, 10/9/09.*

## **CHRISTUS Health Engages in Discussion About Health Care Reform**

Around the CHRISTUS regions, hospitals and associates engaged in the broader discussions about the nature of health care reform leading up the summer work of Congress and during the August recess.

- CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health System attended community health care reform forums hosted by the San Antonio Medical Foundation Board, the Greater San Antonio Hospital Council and the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce. These events provided the opportunity for questions and discussions with U.S. Reps. Lamar Smith, Charlie Gonzalez and Henry Cuellar. These forums allowed CHRISTUS to expand upon the principles of “Putting Care Within Reach.”
- CHRISTUS St. Patrick Hospital hosted Louisiana Sen. David Vitter’s Health Care Reform Roundtable with physicians and hospital CEO’s on August 27. About 40 participants engaged in the discussions. Sen. Vitter discussed his concerns with the various health care reform proposals, especially with regard to the public option and the issue of cost. Vitter proposes a targeted approach focusing on pooling insurance across state lines, primary and preventive care emphasis, as well as medical liability reform.
- Congressman Rodney Alexander held a town hall meeting at CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini, in a forum that afforded the system the opportunity to discuss “Putting Care Within Reach.” The event drew some debate and respectful disagreement, and many in attendance expressed concern about various issues related to the national health care reform initiatives. Other notables included in the discussions were Susan Tudor, Vice President of Business Development at St. Frances Cabrini, David Holcombe, M.D., Direction for Region VI of the Office of Public Health; Sara Van Gertruden, a lobbyist for CHRISTUS from Washington, D.C.; Dottie Lary, R.N., Dean of the School of Nursing at LSUA; and Ray Peters, Vice President from ROM Industries.
- CHRISTUS Schumpert CEO Stephen Wright hosted more than 100 Shreveport area residents and community leaders, along with a panel of seven health care experts on May 28 in the “CHRISTUS Putting Care Within Reach Congressional Roundtable.” The panelists included U.S. Reps. Rodney Alexander and John Fleming, M.D.; Senior Vice President of Business, Strategy and Corporate Development of CHRISTUS Health Peter Maddox; Senior Director of Advocacy and Public Policy for CHRISTUS Health Patti Harper; Executive Director of the David Raines Community Center Willie White; Dr. Terry Davis of the LSU Health Sciences Center; and Senior Director of Community Benefits of Catholic Health Association Julie Trocchio. Audience members represented a cross-section of the business community, church organizations, and other members of the health care community as well as concerned citizens.
- On May 28, 2009, CHRISTUS St. Joseph’s Home and Assisted Living Center in Monroe hosted a Congressional Roundtable discussion emphasizing the “Putting Care Within Reach” message. The discussion had over 150 members of the local community in attendance, along with U.S. Representative Rodney Alexander. Also in attendance were Linda Holyfield, CEO of P&S Surgical Hospital; Julie Trocchio, Senior Director of Community Benefits and Continuing Care for the Catholic Health Association, and Jason Tudor of the AARP. Each of the panelists shared a short presentation of facts related to the current condition of health care. Rep. Alexander shared that “the ninth district is one of if not the poorest districts in the nation. We need to do a better job of education about health care.”
- Representing the Fourth Congressional District of Texas, U.S. Representative Ralph Hall visited CHRISTUS St. Michael’s on August 6 to discuss health reform with the CSM administrative team and CSM Board President Borden Bell. Also, on August 13, U.S. Rep. Mike Ross from the Fourth Congressional District of Arkansas, hosted a roundtable session at CHRISTUS St. Michael regarding

health care reform. By invitation from Rep. Ross' office, individuals representing a cross-section of citizens including small business owners, veterans, health care providers, the uninsured and industry were all given the opportunity to participate in the discussions. Rep. Ross fielded several questions from participants regarding various components of the proposed measures for health care reform.

- While CHRISTUS Spohn has not yet hosted a health care forum, U.S. Rep. Solomon Ortiz met with CEO Bruce Holstien, in a discussion that provided some insights on the congressman's views on health care reform, while allowing the opportunity for him to become familiar with the principles behind "Putting Care Within Reach." Mr. Holstien further used the opportunity to explain the UPL program and its impact on the district, as well as cost control and other local economic development issues. Rep. Ortiz asked for a follow-up letter outlining the top concerns of CHRISTUS Health and for talking points to use following the August recess.
- In Beaumont, CHRISTUS St. Elizabeth facilitated a Town Hall meeting for CHRISTUS Hospital Associates and Physicians in southeast Texas with Congressman Ted Poe to discuss health care reform. CHRISTUS was also represented at a Town Hall Meeting at Lamar University with community representatives, physicians and elected officials from Southeast Texas. In addition, CHRISTUS met with state Sen. Tommy Williams and Reps. Joe Deshotel, Alan Ritter and Mike Hamilton to engage in broader discussions about topics related to health care reform and potential impact on Texas.

###