



March 31, 2006

CRD ASSOCIATES HEALTH POLICY UPDATE

March 2006

Congress – The House of Representatives was in session for 13 days during the month of January. It has been dealing with relatively minor legislative issues, other than the passage of an immigration-related bill to tighten enforcement and increase penalties related to illegal immigration. The Senate was in session for 16 days. Its most significant accomplishment for the month was the passage of Budget Resolution that incorporated the Specter-Harkin amendment, boosting spending for health and education programs by \$7 billion.

Title VII-Health Professions Training – We are continuing to work with our colleagues in the health professions training community to encourage members of the House and Senate to restore the funding that has been cut from the President's FY2007 budget request. In addition, we are awaiting an outline for SGIM preferences for inclusion in a reauthorization bill, should such a bill be crafted by the Senate HELP Committee later this spring.

Health Services Research – We are continuing to work with the Friends of AHRQ, which has now adopted SGIM's policy of promoting investigator-initiated grants within AHRQ's funding. We have met with the staff to the House Appropriations subcommittee to express SGIM's concern with the shortsighted underfunding of this agency – a position with which they surprisingly agreed.

Veterans Health Funding – We have continued working with the Friends of the VA (FOVA) to support higher levels of funding for VA health research and services, including supporting a statement from FOVA. In addition, we have circulated to the HPC leadership a draft FOVA letter that would urge that VA medical research funding be kept free of earmarks for consideration of signing.

Pay-for-Performance – We are continuing to closely monitor legislative and administrative action with regard to the creation of a pay for performance system and the adoption of quality-related standards. No significant actions have occurred this month.

Capitol Hill Day – SGIM conducted its second Capitol Hill Day within nine months on March 15. The SGIM and HPC leadership participated in the activities that included meetings on both the House and Senate sides of the Capitol. Agenda items were well received by staff and legislators and the timing of the day – coming just before Senate action on increasing the budget for education and healthcare – was excellent. In addition, we organized SGIM’s first-ever Off the Hill Week, enabling members who were not able to come to Washington for CHD to participate by meeting with their representatives in their home districts or states. During their meetings (and through a simultaneous grassroots alert) SGIM members encouraged Senate lawmakers to adopt the Specter-Harkin amendment to the Budget Resolution, which was subsequently adopted by a vote of 73 to 27.

Health Policy Committee – Working with the Chair, we established the agenda for the monthly HPC conference call, actively participated in the call, and wrote the minutes of the call.

Annual Meeting – We are actively involved with a variety of sessions at the Annual Meeting. CRD will be presenting at or otherwise participating in the outgoing Board’s meeting; the Advocacy Precourse; the Regional President’s retreat; the Health Policy Committee meeting; the workshop called “Influencing Federal Policy;” and the “Advocacy and Pay for Performance” symposium.

April 2006

Congress – The “start and stop” Congress is going to stop again in April. Both houses will take a two-week Easter/Passover recess in the middle of the month. As a result, we expect relatively little legislative progress. The House will seek to pass its version of the Budget resolution in the first week of April and SGIM and others in the healthcare advocacy community will seek to replicate our success in getting a \$7.0 billion increase for education and health spending. Failing that, we will seek to defeat the budget resolution.

Title VII – We will continue working with the Title VII Cluster, the HPC and other advocates to develop a practical reauthorization proposal that serves to enhance the attractiveness of general internal medicine as a career option. We also will continue to argue for restoring the cuts recommended in the President’s budget for Title VII.

Health Services Research – We will continue to work with both AHRQ and NIH to promote policies that enhance federal funding of health services research. We will also be taking part in a number of the meetings being scheduled by the Friends of AHRQ with legislators and staff.

Veterans Health Funding – We will be participating in the meetings and other activities of the Friends of the VA to collectively build our lobbying strategy to obtain more funding for veterans health care and research.

National Institutes of Health – Much of our effort seeking increased funding in the House and Senate budget resolutions is designed specifically to enable NIH to receive additional funding in FY2007. The focus on these efforts will continue and will intensify in April although some of the activity will shift “back home” because of the congressional recess.

Pay-for-Performance – This will continue to be a hot-button issue in April and throughout the year. We will continue to participate in meetings of the major coalitions that are interested in the issue’s development. Legislative action is not expected on pay-for-performance until 2007.

Health Policy Committee – Again this month, we will work with the HPC Chair to set an agenda for the monthly conference call, alert members to the call, participate in it, and produce minutes, as well as take any actions derived from the call.

Annual Meeting – We expect to complete work on the presentations we will be making in various sessions at the Annual Meeting in Los Angeles and be active participants in that meeting.

Status of Key Legislative Issues

President’s Budget – Was delivered to Capitol Hill on February 6.

House Labor-HHS and Veterans Appropriations Bills – Hearings are currently being held and the crafting of legislation is anticipated in May or June.

Senate Labor-HHS and Veterans Appropriations Bills – Hearings have begun and no dates have yet been set for the drafting of legislation.

AHRO Reauthorization Bill – Senate HELP Committee staff expects to begin working on a bill later in the spring.

Title VII Reauthorization Bill – Senate HELP Committee staff expects to begin working on a bill in late spring.

Pay-for-Performance – Dropped from reconciliation bill; legislative prospects uncertain. CMS demonstration project has begun in scaled-back format.

Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) – This bill has passed the Senate; awaiting action in the House, where the leadership has been opposed to its consideration. The Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Genetics, Health and Society has expressed some urgency to Congress on the need to adopt it.