

This Week in Health Reform: August 28

This past week, [Sen. Ted Kennedy](#), longtime champion of universal health coverage, died at age 77. It remains to be seen how his death will affect the debate over health care reform as Democrats plug on without his guidance. Kennedy was involved in nearly every piece of health care legislation that moved through Congress during his eight-term Senate tenure. In a statement, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said “Ted Kennedy’s dream of quality health care for all Americans will be made real this year because of his leadership and his inspiration.”

Health Care Reform Activities:

Obama Guarantees Health Care Reform: After much infighting over the fate of the public option, this week [President Obama](#) reaffirmed his commitment to health care reform legislation and went further in suggesting that he would be willing to bypass the GOP. As [Democrats](#) consider a wide range of strategies for getting a health reform bill passed—with or without Republican support, other [key senators](#) call for the President to move more slowly as concerns over the growing [deficit](#) and the economic recession remain.

Republicans Launch Senior Health Bill of Rights: On Monday the Republican National Committee introduced a [‘seniors’ health care bill of rights’](#) outlining six principles for health care reform, including protecting Medicare, prohibiting rationing of health care based on age, and making sure the government does not get between seniors and their doctors.

Democrats Launch National Grassroots Offensive: Facing growing public concern over health care reform, Democrats have launched a grassroots initiative in an effort to show lawmakers that the majority of Americans still support overhauling the health care system. The Democratic National Committee’s Organizing for America and Health Care for America Now is working to hold more than [500 events](#) across the country between Wednesday and early September, when [lawmakers](#) return to Washington.

New Divides Emerge on Senate Side: Senate aides indicated that as Senate Finance Committee negotiators work to trim costs of their bill, [new divisions](#) are emerging between Republican and Democratic Senators over proposals to reduce the size of insurance tax credits to families and trim back insurance coverage mandates. The Gang of Six rejected imposing deadlines on their efforts to reach bipartisanship legislation and agreed to talk again [September 4](#).

\$1.2 Billion Allocated for Electronic Medical Records: Obama Administration officials announced last Thursday that [\\$1.2 billion](#) in federal grants will be available for electronic health record systems. This is the first wave of funding under a health care reform plan to create record-sharing networks. The \$1.2 billion is part of the \$36 billion originally included within the stimulus legislation to spur the adoption of electronic medical records by hospitals and doctors.

Looking Ahead:

Lawmakers are slated to return to Washington September 8th.