

This Week in Health Care Reform: April 23, 2010

Republicans continued to express their commitment this week to repealing the health care legislation, while Democrats continued to tout the law's merits and welcomed its implementation.

As the health care reform debate continues to take shape this year, we encourage you and others to engage members of Congress by visiting the [Health Action Network](#).

### **Health Care Reform**

***WellPoint to Cover Young Adults Before the Law Requires:*** [WellPoint](#), along with several other health insurance [companies](#), announced on Monday that its affiliated health plans will take steps to prevent a gap in coverage that could leave many young Americans uninsured. [WellPoint](#), UnitedHealthcare, Humana, Kaiser Permanente, and [Aetna](#) said they will initiate a [provision](#) of the new health care law ahead of schedule. The new health care law will extend the dependent age for coverage to 26 for plan years beginning September 23, 2010. As a proactive measure to assist its members, beginning on June 1, WellPoint's affiliated health plans will allow young adults to remain on their parents' policies even before this health care reform provision takes effect.

***Coverage Gap for Members of Congress Resolved:*** White House officials announced this week that a problem with particular language in the new health care reform law has been [resolved](#), closing the coverage gap for members of Congress and their staff. Lawmakers and staff had expressed concern that they would be forced out of their current health care [coverage](#) under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program prior to the creation of state-run exchanges in 2014.

### **Additional Activities**

***Senate Proposes Bill to Regulate Premiums:*** On Tuesday, Senator Dianne [Feinstein](#) (D-CA) introduced legislation that would [allow](#) for the federal regulation of premiums, allowing the Health and Human Services secretary to regulate premium rates in those states where officials don't have the authority or capacity to do it themselves. In response to this proposal, President and CEO of America's Health Insurance Plans, [Karen Ignagni](#), said "Health plan premiums are a symptom, not a cause of the problem." Republican lawmakers and insurance industry leaders say the push for more regulation will not address rising medical costs, which many experts say are helping drive up premiums.

***Alaska Joins Lawsuit Against Health Care Reform Bill:*** Alaska Governor Sean [Parnell](#) announced this week that his state will join 19 others in suing the federal government over the health care reform law. The states' Attorneys [General](#) allege the new law infringes on Americans' constitutional rights by mandating that they purchase health care coverage or pay a penalty. Attorney General [Dan Sullivan](#) will represent Alaska and join the multiparty lawsuit filed on March 23 in a federal court in Florida. Other [states](#) in the

suit include Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Washington.

***More Doctors Running for Congress:*** The number of [doctors](#) serving in Congress is likely to increase next year with 47 physicians running for House or Senate in the November midterm [elections](#). Sixteen physicians currently serve in the legislative branch. As John Fritz of *USA Today* pointed out, if just a fraction of the [41 Republicans](#) and 6 Democrats become elected, the influx of doctors to Congress could drastically alter the landscape for future debates over Medicare, rising insurance premiums, and other health care reform issues.

### **Public Opinion**

***American Support of Repeal Remains Steady:*** According to a newly released [Rasmussen report](#), 56 percent of Americans still favor repealing the new health care reform law. Support for the law's repeal has remained in the narrow range of 54 to 58 percent since the bill's passage four weeks ago. Furthermore, 52 percent of likely voters continue to feel the legislation is bad for the country.

***Obama's Job Approval Ratings Fall to Lowest in Presidency:*** In a recent [Gallup poll](#), President Obama's job approval rating for his fifth quarter in office fell to 48.8 percent, the lowest of his presidency. The daily tracking, spanning January 20 – April 19, indicates that the ongoing economic recession and the lengthy debate on health care have taken a toll on his popularity.

### **Looking Ahead**

President Obama will travel to the Midwest next week to speak with small-business owners, farmers and local leaders about jobs, the economy and the benefits of his new health care law, as lawmakers in Washington plan to focus on other issues including financial reform and climate change.