

This Week in Health Care Reform: July 29, 2010

This past week saw continued debate over the merits of health care reform, both in the halls of Capitol Hill and on the campaign trail.

As opportunities arise during implementation of the health care reform legislation, we encourage you and others to engage members of Congress by visiting the [Health Action Network](#).

### **Health Care Reform**

***Questions on Capitol Hill*** – Republican lawmakers in Washington continued to [question](#) the benefits of the health care reform bill, with Republican Senators Enzi (R-WY) and Grassley (R-IA) issuing a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Sebelius late last week demanding transparency around the Administration's actuarial analysis that shows insurance premiums likely to increase by less than 1 percent. Additional Republican dissension came this week from Senator Cornyn (R-TX) who introduced a bill to [repeal](#) the law's independent panel in charge of enforcing an upper limit on Medicare spending. The Senator argued that its function is tantamount to a government takeover. Four additional Republican Senators co-sponsored the bill.

On the House side, the conservative grassroots advocacy group Heritage Action for America continues to gin up support for Rep. Steve King (R-IA)'s [discharge petition](#) to repeal the health care reform legislation. The petition has so far garnered 153 signatures of the 218 required signatures. The group is appealing to the grassroots in advance of the August congressional recess, through press releases in targeted congressional districts.

***Reform on the Campaign Trail*** – Representative Dan Boren (D-OK), who voted against health care reform last March [defeated](#) opponent Jim Wilson with 75 percent of the vote, in a primary race that many saw as a referendum on health care reform. As Politico [pointed out](#) in its coverage, his victory makes him “the third House Democrat voting 'no' on health to beat back a challenger from the left. In each case the liberal challenger failed to draw significant financial support from national groups backing health reform.”

Further evidencing the significance of the health reform bill in this fall's election, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)'s Republican opponent, Dino Rossi, [informed](#) media this week of his plans to make repeal of the health care reform legislation a major campaign issue.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) is also making health care reform a campaign [issue](#), in an effort to not only preserve the Senate's Democratic majority, but to preserve his seat in November. To an audience of progressive activists, “I wish we had a public option. But we are going to have a public option. It is just a question of when.”

Looking past the November elections, Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX), the senior Republican on the Joint Economic Committee, said that if the Republicans take control of either the House or the Senate, they plan to hold intense hearings and investigations on health care

reform implementation and [defund](#) as much of the legislation that they can. Brady told Politico, “House Republicans are absolutely committed ... to ‘zero funding’.”

***Latest from the White House*** – White House officials this week posted a new [video](#) featuring President Obama giving Americans a tour of the HealthCare.gov website. "The video released today shows the American people just how easy using HealthCare.gov can be," the White House officials said.

In addition, the Department of Health and Human Services [issued an advisory](#) that allows insurers to implement “open enrollment” periods, outside of which families would not be able to purchase child-only insurance policies. The purpose of the advisory is to prevent families from buying health insurance only after a child becomes sick. The advisory does not specify when insurers must hold open-enrollment periods, how long they must be or how often they must be offered.

***Health Care Reform in the States*** – In Missouri, organizers behind the country's first health care reform repeal ballot [raised](#) \$50,000 over the past two weeks, a sharp increase over the \$23,000 raised in campaign’s first month. The group, Missourians for Health Care Freedom is running ads on a dozen conservative talk radio stations until the August 3rd vote.

In West Virginia, lawmakers [announced](#) at the end of a special legislative session Wednesday that the state will not run its own high risk pool because of the abortion issue. While Republicans fear the program will fund abortions, Democrats chose not to debate the issue. This mirrors the national debate as Senate Republicans [sent a letter](#) to Secretary Sebelius asking her to ensure that the pools do not fund abortions.

## **Public Opinion**

***Seniors Confused by Health Care Reform:*** According to a new Harris Interactive [poll](#), conducted for the National Council on Aging (NCOA), most seniors are [misinformed or simply unaware](#) about new health care reforms. NCOA's survey asked seniors 12 questions about Medicare, the budget deficit and other pertinent health care reform topics. Only 17% of the 636 seniors surveyed knew the correct answers to more than half the questions. None of the survey participants knew the correct answers to all 12 of the factual questions. As a result, NCOA is launching a national campaign to educate older Americans through town hall meetings and informational materials distributed through local agencies focused on aging.

***Seniors Still Have a Negative View of Health Care Reform:*** The July Kaiser Health Tracking Poll notes that 46% of [seniors have a negative view](#) of the health care legislation passed earlier this year. When asked how the legislation will affect them, 20% of seniors polled said they would be better off; 37% said it would have no affect; and 35% said they would be worse off. In addition, there is still confusion about some of the provisions in the bill. Half of seniors (50%) say the law will cut benefits that were

previously provided to all people on Medicare, and more than a third (36%) believe the law will “allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare.” Overall, the poll found that 50% of Americans surveyed support the reform legislation (+2 since June), while 35% oppose it (-6) and 27% (even) support the bill’s repeal.

### **Looking Ahead**

Lawmakers plan to continue work through next week, after which they will adjourn for the August recess. It is highly unlikely that there will be congressional action on health care-related issues.