

THE CSTE WASHINGTON REPORT

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Last evening, President Obama delivered an impassioned speech to a joint session of Congress urging the Members to finish work on health care reform. It was an effort to get beyond the doubts and acrimony engendered during town hall meetings held over the August recess. The acrimony, however, was still evident in the chamber when a House Member, Joe Wilson (R-SC), shouted out "You lie!" at the President when he stated that no illegal immigrants would be covered in his health care plan. Admonished by Members in both parties, Wilson issued a quick and clear apology. There may be additional consequences from his actions that some feel may strengthen the Democrats agenda. Meanwhile, Sen. Baucus (D-MT), Chairman of the Finance Committee, the last Committee of jurisdiction to act on health care reform, announced he will unveil his bill next week and has scheduled Committee mark-up the week of September 21st.

The *CSTE Washington Report* is provided as an information resource for members of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists on federal legislation and regulation affecting public health and epidemiology in the U.S.

HOUSE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON REAUTHORIZATION OF RYAN WHITE CARE ACT -- On September 9th, the House Energy and Commerce Committee held a hearing on a discussion draft of legislation reauthorizing the Ryan White CARE Act. The current Act expires on September 30, 2009. Hearing witnesses included Mary Wakefield, PhD, RN, Administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration which implements the Act; Marcia Crosse, PhD, Health Care Director, of the Government Accountability Office (GAO); Julie Scofield, Executive Director of the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors; and Donna Elaine Sweet, MD, MACP, AAHIVS, Professor, Department of Internal Medicine, University of Kentucky, School of Medicine, and Board Chair, American Academy of HIV Medicine. In her testimony, Ms. Scofield urged the Committee to include language in must-do, moving legislation to extend the current Act as is for three more years to minimize disruption of program activities while Congress works on separate, stand-alone bills. She also addressed a number of specific issues such as extending the hold-harmless provisions as states continue to mature toward name HIV reporting systems; increasing the funding allotments; increasing flexibility in obligating funds to help states avoid penalties; and other issues. Her testimony and a copy of the discussion draft can be read at: <http://energycommerce.house.gov/>

SENATOR HARKIN (D-IA) TO BECOME CHAIRMAN OF THE HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE (HELP) – Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) will assume the Chairmanship of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee following the death of Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA). This occurred after Sen. Dodd (D-CT), who had functioned as acting chairman during Kennedy's illness, announced his intention to stay as Chairman of the Banking Committee. Sen. Harkin also Chairs the Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations making him very powerful in both effecting legislation and in funding it. The HELP Committee has a key role in shaping health care reform and in authorizing public health programs. Sen. Harkin has been the primary advocate during the health care reform debate on behalf of prevention and wellness provisions in the legislation. Sen. Harkin has indicated that his priorities in the final months of the first session of the 111th Congress are, in the following order: finishing health care reform, finalizing student loan legislation, and marking up food safety. The Committee would likely take up S. 510, the FDA Modernization Act, introduced earlier this year by Sen. Durbin (D-IL). A similar bill has passed the House, H.R. 2749, the Food Safety Enhancement Act. Both bills have surveillance sections that call for an assessment of state and local capacity and enhancement where needed.

HHS LAUNCHES ADS TO COMBAT CHILDHOOD OBESITY – On Sept. 10, HHS announced a joint effort with the Ad Council and Warner Bros. Pictures to combat childhood obesity. The effort involves airing of public service announcements featuring characters from the movie, "Where the Wild Things Are," who urge children to play every day. The ads are being distributed to media outlets nationwide this week.

According to HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980, with more than 9 million

school age children over the age of 6 in the U.S. considered overweight. In addition to the psychological and social issues of stigmatization, overweight children are at far greater risk of growing into adults who have cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and other chronic diseases that may reduce the length and quality of their lives. A recent report also illustrated that the health cost of obesity in the United States is as high as \$147 billion annually.

HHS AND USDA UNVEIL NEW FOOD SAFETY CONSUMER WEB SITE – On September 9, US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack, co-chairs of the Obama Administration’s Food Safety Working Group, unveiled a new consumer Web site at www.foodsafety.gov. The site is designed to help consumers and families get all the latest information on food safety and food recalls in one convenient place.

The new site will feature information from all the agencies across the federal government that deal with critical food and food safety information, including preventive tips about how to handle food safely, alerts on life-saving food recalls, and the latest news from the key agencies.

Consumers can sign up in one easy place to receive email and RSS alerts on recalled or potentially unsafe food and hear from the top scientific experts across the government on food safety. Later phases of the site to be launched will include recall feeds for texting and mobile phones. The site will also feature a foodsafety.gov widget that the public and the media are encouraged to download and promote on their Web sites and social networking sites. The widget will instantly update viewers with the latest food safety recalls and will be a valuable public health and safety tool.

HIV SCREENING TESTS TO BE COVERED BY MEDICARE – On September 9th, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced a proposal to cover screening for HIV for Medicare beneficiaries who are at increased risk for the infection, including women who are pregnant and Medicare beneficiaries of any age who voluntarily request the service. In making the announcement, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said, “The President has set clear priorities for an improved national response to ending the HIV epidemic. Today’s action by HHS’ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) sends a strong signal that this Administration takes prevention very seriously, especially when it comes to HIV and AIDS.”

“While younger age groups account for most cases of HIV infection in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that in 2006, approximately 19 percent of all U.S. residents with AIDS were age 50 years or older when the disease was diagnosed,” she added. “Knowing about their HIV status can help patients live longer, fuller lives as well as avoid unintentional transmission of the virus to others.”

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