Advocacy Update

August 3, 2009

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate forged ahead on health care reform; however, neither the House nor the Senate were able to pass their respective versions of health care reform before adjourning for the August Congressional recess period which begins on August 3rd. Unfortunately, this delay means that Congress will miss the deadline set by the President earlier this year to enact health care reform.

Before leaving to begin the August Congressional recess period, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) reached a deal with 4 of the 7 Blue Dog Coalition members that sit on the Committee. The Blue Dog Coalition, who so far had been a roadblock to finalizing the House bill, consists of 50 fiscally conservative Democratic members of the House. With this deal, the mark-up of H.R. 3200, the *America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009* (the House version of health care reform), continued so that the Committee could finalize the bill. The Energy and Commerce Committee mark-up was the one of the remaining hurdles for the bill before reaching the House floor. The deal with the Blue Dog Coalition reduces subsidies to low-income Americans, prevents a new public insurance plan from being based on Medicare rates, increases exemptions for small businesses and cuts the cost of the overall package by more than \$100 billion. Additionally, this deal pushes off until September a vote on the House floor.

In the Senate, the Finance Committee continues bipartisan negotiations on their portion of the health care reform bill and is expected to release its version of health care reform upon returning from the August Congressional recess period. In the Senate, the Finance Committee members negotiating the sweeping reform package are close to dropping a requirement that employers provide health insurance for employees as well as a government-run public insurance plan to forge a compromise, despite the President's support for such measures. The Finance bill is shaping up to be significantly different from H.R. 3200 and the health care reform bill passed by the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. It is expected to lack both a government-run insurance plan and a mandate that employers cover their workers. Additionally, Finance members are leaning toward a tax on generous insurance plans to fund their bill, instead of the surtax on wealthy Americans included in H.R. 3200.

Both the House and Senate expect to pass their respective health care reform bills when they return in September. The IMF will continue to keep patients, family members, health care providers and supporters apprised of the developments for U.S. health care reform. Please visit the IMF advocacy page at www.myeloma.org for more information on health care reform or other important advocacy issues that impact the myeloma community.

Please visit our <u>Advocacy Action Center</u> (<u>http://www.capwiz.com/myeloma/home/</u>) to see how you can help with these and other efforts.