



November 19, 2007

With the stroke of his veto pen, President Bush put the brakes on next year's funding increase for health centers. After bipartisan majorities in Congress passed the Fiscal Year 2008 Labor-HHS appropriations legislation last week (containing a record \$225 million increase for Health Centers), President Bush backed up the threats he had been making since last spring and vetoed it. Bush [cited](#) the fact that the bill exceeds his budget request by roughly \$10 billion, and accused Congress of "acting like a teenager with a new credit card." Congress attempted to override the President's veto but, despite a strong push by health center advocates and a broad coalition of other groups, the vote in the House fell two votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to override. Click [here](#) for NACHC's statement on the veto and [here](#) to see how your Member of Congress voted on the override. While the next steps are uncertain, [Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid \(D-NV\)](#) indicated Democrats plan to prepare a catch-all "omnibus" spending bill that would "split the difference" with the President on domestic spending increases. If that passes, health center funding will be more than \$100 million LOWER than the funding in current bill. With time running short, NACHC is doing everything possible to make sure the final package includes funds for the expansion of health centers.

On the bright side, hope springs eternal for health center reauthorization, now heading to the Senate floor. The [Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions \(HELP\) Committee](#) last week unanimously approved landmark health centers reauthorization legislation, sending it to the full Senate for consideration. Originally named the "Health Centers Renewal Act," the HELP-passed bill was renamed the "Health Care Safety Net Act," and not only includes a 5 year, straight reauthorization of the Health Centers program, but a 5 year reauthorization of the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and other Public Health Service Act Rural Health programs. Most notably, the legislation prescribes historic funding authorization levels for the Health Centers program. It also reauthorizes and provides for increased NHSC funding and makes automatic Health Professional Shortage Area designation permanent for all health centers. Senate lawmakers are expected to take up the bill in early December. The heat is now on the House Energy and Commerce Committee to act on the legislation before lawmakers adjourn later next month.

Medicare Open-Enrollment Period STARTS NOW! Open-enrollment period is the time when new Medicare-eligible beneficiaries can shop around and enroll in the health insurance and prescription drug plan that meets their health care needs. Currently enrolled Medicare beneficiaries should also use this time to evaluate their current health plans and drug coverage to determine whether they should continue in their same plan or switch to a plan that is more affordable and better suited to their needs. It is important that health centers help their seniors get informed about their plan options and available benefits. Doing your research is important because many times a drug plan will change their formulary and cost-sharing requirements annually. Health center patients who are seniors should understand the Medicare Part D prescription drug low-income subsidy (LIS) benefit and see if they can qualify to save up to \$3,600 in prescription drug costs. Click [here](#) to access LIS information including the application. Now there's a web-based Prescription Drug Plan Finder tool that allows beneficiaries to compare

area drug plans. Visit www.medicare.gov to access this tool as well as other helpful Medicare information.

On a related note, the Medicare help line at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services didn't pass a test run by Senate Aging Committee Ranking Member Gordon Smith (R-OR). Smith said his staff made 15 test calls to 1-800-MEDICARE last week, asking basic questions including, "What is the difference between Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage?" and "What are the enrollment periods for these plans?" "The answers were all over the board and they were often inaccurate," Smith complained. CMS is looking into the matter.

Whatever happened in Vegas didn't stay in Vegas—at least in matters concerning the Democratic Presidential candidates. Seven Democratic presidential candidates clashed over health reform proposals at the [University of Nevada-Las Vegas](#). During the debate, U.S. Sen. [Hillary Rodham Clinton \(D-NY\)](#) took on [U.S. Sen. Barack Obama \(D-IL\)](#) and said his health care [proposal](#) "would leave 15 million Americans out" because it does not require all U.S. residents to get health insurance, a mandate included in her [proposal](#). Obama countered, "The only difference between Senator Clinton's health care plan and mine is that she thinks the problem for people without health care is that nobody has mandated -- forced -- them to get health care." He added, "That's not what I'm seeing...What I see are people who would love to have health care. They desperately want it. But the problem is they can't afford it." Meanwhile, a [new report](#) says the health care proposals offered by all of the presidential candidates do not go far enough to create a "high performance" health care system and suggests proposals go a step further to allow all U.S. residents to have health insurance that they can keep when they change jobs or become widowed, etc.

Here's some good news about a successful AHEC-health center collaboration on a top priority issue: the future of the health center work force. Thanks to a \$2.6 million federal grant, students at [Warren Alpert Medical School](#) at Brown University are getting real-world experience working in underserved communities in partnership with health centers. You can read more about it [here](#).

In the spotlight: In Colorado Springs, a real champion attended the third annual breakfast of champions at [Peak Vista Community Health Center](#). The health center held its third annual fundraising event featuring Olympic gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey. The former track and field star provided the keynote at the event, which raised more than \$100,000. You can read more about it on the [NACHC blog](#). The [Deering Community Health Center](#) in Montana was cited in an article in the Billings Gazette about local dentists getting together to provide free services for patients on Thanksgiving Day. You can read the article [here](#).

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The defense bill includes \$13.2 billion for three big-ticket items - a new fighter jet, a new class of attack submarine and a new type of naval destroyer. Meanwhile, [President] Bush is objecting to a health and education bill that would have restored many of his administration's cuts and added needed money for job training, education, community health centers and research at the National Institutes of Health.”

-Las Vegas Sun [editorial](#) regarding the President's veto of the Labor-HHS spending bill.