



December 10, 2007

The Bush Administration touts health center expansion initiative as a major feather in its cap. This week the [Department of Health and Human Services](#) heralded the completion of the President's health center initiative. "People served by health centers are among the most vulnerable in America," said Secretary Leavitt in a [press release](#) issued last week. "By extending care to communities where none existed before, we are strengthening the nation's health care safety net for those with nowhere to turn." The Initiative included the funding for 1,236 new and expanded centers since 2001.

The President stayed on point as he delivered praise of the health center mission -While major battles on Capitol Hill are near eruption over next year's budget. During a visit to OneWorld Community Health Center in Omaha, NE, the President touted the accomplishments of the federal Health Centers program, and committed to "working with Congress to continue to expand the reach of these important facilities." You can read more on the President's remarks [here](#). Speaking of expansion, the fight between Congress and the White House over next year's budget will face several crucial votes this week. The bottom line this week - funding increases for next year are hanging by thread as Congress struggles to find a compromise. House lawmakers will vote on a large "omnibus" spending bill this week, combining nearly all domestic spending into one package. What this will mean for health centers is uncertain at best at press time, but what remains clear is that passage of this legislation represents the "*last best chance at a funding increase for the program this year,*" says NACHC staffer John Sawyer. Unfortunately it is beginning to look like the budget battles have been overtaken by presidential campaigns, competing fiscal priorities, spending on the Iraq war, and the short time left on the legislative calendar. At this time, passing any increase in funding into law before Christmas will be a major victory. Stay tuned for updates on health center funding and to take action on this important issue!

Efforts on health center reauthorization continue in successful House Committee hearing; Congress will likely delay further action until next year. Adding to the reauthorization push was a recent [Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee](#) hearing on the health center reauthorization bill (H.R. 1343, the "[Health Centers Renewal Act](#)"). In a jam packed hearing, lawmakers on the Subcommittee reviewed bills to renew the National Health Service Corps (H.R. 2915) as well as a bill to jumpstart a school-based health clinic program (H.R. 4230). [U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone \(D-NJ\)](#) chaired the hearing, overseeing debate which included the subject of health center Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) coverage during public health emergencies and for medical volunteers at all health centers. Three health center Chief Executive Officers were among the witnesses: Steven Miracle, CEO at Georgia Mountains Health Services in Morganton, Georgia; Wilbert Jones, CEO at Greater Meridian Health Clinic, in Meridian, Mississippi, and Ricardo Guzman, CEO at Community Health and Social Services in Detroit, Michigan - all of whom did a stellar job communicating the health center message! Meanwhile, full Senate consideration of S. 901, the Senate version of the Health Centers Renewal Act is still awaiting action since the HELP Committee passage on November 14th. Looking ahead (and in consideration to the Congressional log jam that has developed over past weeks and months) House and Senate lawmakers are not likely to take up either health center reauthorization bill until next year given the daunting agenda of must-pass spending bills that will ultimately take

priority. Health centers are encouraged to contact their Members of Congress to build additional support for the legislation and encourage Congress to GET MOVING on H.R. 1343. To get more information and check the current list of co-sponsors for H.R. 1343, click [here](#).

The SCHIP compromise is now dead, as program funding is set to run out in five days.

Last Friday was the deadline set by House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-CA) for Republican and Democratic House negotiators to come to a common ground and find a way to reauthorize the state Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) which would add \$35 billion over five years to the program. Negotiators not only failed to produce a third compromise by Friday's deadline (remember President Bush vetoed the first two), but lawmakers negotiating the expansion didn't even meet last week to discuss the package. Temporary funding for the current program runs out Friday, so Congress plans to act on another SCHIP extension (not a full reauthorization or expansion) later this week. Next, Democrats are expected to propose extending SCHIP funding through next September - the end of the current federal fiscal year. However, Republican lawmakers want the program's funding extended 18 months so it doesn't become entangled in the 2008 Presidential election and congressional races. Stay tuned for updates!

The Medicare train has jumped the tracks, so to speak. Senate Finance Committee Members have thrown in the towel on internal Committee negotiations on a Medicare package, and instead have taken to talking directly with House lawmakers. The Committee originally intended to follow Committee procedure and "mark up" legislation (that is, act on a pending bill and vote on it). But the devil is in the details, and the details were creating snags (including a Presidential veto threat over the weekend). It is expected that the Medicare bill would prevent a 10% reduction in physician reimbursements while also offsetting reductions to the Medicare Advantage program, similar to legislation the House passed earlier this year. NACHC has also been pushing for the bill to contain improvements to the health center Medicare payment system. Stay tuned to see if Congress and the Administration are able to reach an agreement in the final days of the first session of the 110th Congress.

Kip Landry named NACHC National Community Health Advocate of the Month for December 2007.

A Board Member at Family Health Center in Marshfield, Wisconsin, Kip joined the health center team in 2005 with a fierce commitment to moving the health center mission forward with grassroots momentum. Using multi-media to spread the word about the accomplishments of health centers - in a case in point, Kip recently created a short film developed to highlight the ways in which health centers are addressing the dental needs of low-income residents in the state. Kip took the project on after a challenge from none other than Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle, who reportedly responded, "I'd like to see that," when informed of health centers' plans to address the dental needs of Wisconsin patients. Kip's persistence and commitment to health center advocacy and energetic efforts to engage decision-makers puts him in a category all his own. Join us in congratulating our December National Community Health Advocate of the Month! *And check out his photo on the [NACHC Blog](#).*

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"People here feel a great sense of community and accomplishment, and as well they should, because community health centers, not only here in Omaha, but around the country, provide a very vital service."

- President Bush during a stop in Omaha, NE at a Community Health Center (read full [article](#) here).