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Developments in DC

Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction: Any Progress?

The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction is making slow progress in crafting their \$1.2-\$1.5 trillion proposal due November 23rd to reduce that nation's debt. Committee Chairs have asked members not to talk publicly about the committee's work, making details of the Joint Committee's plan hard to come by.

Tens of thousands of letters and recommendations were submitted to the committee from the public and House and Senate Committees. Based on legislative visits by Community Health Councils and coalition partners, the Joint Committee is working to have a proposal by early November. The proposal will be submitted to the Congressional Budget Office to score and make sure the committee has identified at least \$1.2 trillion in revenue and/or cuts.

With less than five weeks left in the process, now is the time to weigh in and urge the committee to include significant revenue increases in their proposal. CHC has developed five recommendations to help guide deficit reduction discussions:

1. Solutions must address the root causes of the national debt
2. Solutions must be balanced, include revenue, and eliminate costly tax entitlements
3. Solutions must include strategies that lift children and families out of poverty
4. Solutions should create job growth and prevent further job loss
5. Solutions must protect the health of communities.

Please read CHC's issue brief *Jobs, Healthy Communities & Revenue: Keys to Deficit Reduction* at

www.chc-inc.org/issue-briefs to learn more about these recommendations. If you support these recommendations, sign our petition at www.chc-inc.org/action-alerts.

The White House on Jobs & Deficit Reduction

At the beginning of September, President Obama released two critical proposals on jobs and deficit reduction for Congress to act upon. The American Jobs Act outlined \$447 billion in job creation initiatives that include tax cuts for small businesses to hire new employees, \$240 billion for the extension and expansion of current payroll tax cuts, and \$140 billion in funding for schools, public works and state infrastructure projects. To fund the proposal, President Obama called on the Joint Select Committee to incorporate job growth in their proposal to Congress. Read the American Jobs Act at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/jobsact#sub5-tab> for more details.

On the heels of the release of his jobs plan, President Obama provided congressional members and the Joint Select Committee with his proposal to reduce the deficit by \$3 trillion over the next ten years. The plan includes \$1.5 trillion in new revenue, \$1 trillion in defense savings from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and roughly \$580 billion in cuts to Medicaid (\$72 billion), Medicare (\$248 billion), and other programs. The \$1.5 trillion in new revenue would come in the form of lower tax rates, the expiration of high-income tax cuts, and the elimination of wasteful loopholes like tax breaks for oil and gas companies and corporate jets, among others. More information on the President's plan is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/09/19/president-s-plan-economic-growth-and-deficit-reduction-0>.

California Legislation

Governor Jerry Brown signed into law several health-related bills from the 2011 legislation session prior to the October 9th deadline. A quick run-down of bills CHC has been following appears below.

Improving Maternal and Infant Care

- AB 210 and SB 222: Under current law, *healthcare service plans* such as HMOs regulated by the Department of Managed Health Care are required to provide maternity services, but *health insurers*,

regulated by the Department of Insurance are not. This loophole is patched for group plans by AB 210 and for individual plans by SB 222 effective July 1, 2012. Maternity coverage on individual plans had dwindled from 84% to 12% in the last seven years.

- SB 299: Effective January 1, 2012, this bill will require employers to provide up to four months of maternity leave and prohibits them from discontinuing benefits during that time.
- SB 502: This bill is a tempered win for breastfeeding advocates by requiring hospitals with perinatal units to post and communicate an infant feeding policy by January 1, 2014. According to a recent WIC report, fewer than 10% of California hospitals meet the CDC's goals for breastfeeding.

Expanding the Office of the Patient Advocate

- AB 922: The Governor signed AB 922, which transfers the Department of Managed Health Care and, effective July 1, 2012, the Office of the Patient Advocate (OPA) to the California Health and Human Services Agency. The bill expands the OPA, giving it greater responsibility to provide outreach and education to consumers. It also positions the OPA as a centralized source of information on the Affordable Care Act and consumer assistance with health coverage complaints.

Maintaining Integrity in EHRs

- SB 850 requires electronic health record (EHR) systems to record any changes or deletions within an EHR and ensures that the patient's right to access or receive a copy of his or her medical record applies to electronic medical records as well as paper records. This bill helps to assure that patients' medical records are maintained with accuracy and integrity, thereby assisting providers to provide quality care and reduce medical errors.

Vetoed: Hospital Licensing Loophole

- SB 408: One bill that the Governor vetoed is SB 408 on hospital licensing. SB 408 would have closed a loophole that allows hospital operators with questionable quality of care to acquire and manage additional hospitals. Opponents of the bill raised concerns over the burdensome and costly licensing requirements it would have imposed on hospitals and government.

Promoting Access to Health Coverage

- AB 1296: Under the Affordable Care Act, states are required to create a single application to ensure consumers are able to enroll into coverage easily. AB 1296 creates a streamlined application system for determining eligibility and enrolling consumers into Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, and the Exchange by paper, telephone, and online. The single application will help guarantee that an individual seeking coverage is linked to the appropriate program, and it will reduce the application paperwork burden for the individual and the state.
- SB 335: This bill would extend quality assurance fees on hospitals from 2011 to 2013 to increase funding for Medi-Cal healthcare services. Fees collected from private hospitals are estimated to total \$2.2 billion of which \$320 million will be used for children's coverage. The remaining \$1.9 billion will be used to draw down additional federal funding for hospital payments for other Medi-Cal low-income health programs.

Strengthening the State Budget

- AB 1424: The *Delinquent Tax Accountability Act* will allow the state to collect taxes owed by the top 500 debtors in California. This bill will add \$81 million dollars annually to our general fund to ensure California can meet the basic needs of all its residents.

Improving Nutrition & Access to Healthy Foods

- AB 6: This bill reduces barriers to accessing CalFRESH & CalWORKS while simultaneously decreasing the administrative costs associated with operating both programs. AB 6 eliminates the fingerprinting requirement for CalFRESH participation and establishes a semi-annual reporting system for CalWorks and CalFRESH. The bill also implements a "Heat and Eat" program serving as a utility assistance initiative that expands benefits for CalFRESH participants and simplifies the CalFRESH verification process.
- AB 69: AB 69 expedites the CalFRESH application process for social security recipients to increase senior participation in the CalFRESH program. The bill streamlines the application process, simplifies the enrollment process, and permits counties to use data sharing from the social security administration to decrease barriers to accessing the program. Ultimately, this bill attempts to reduce the prevalence of senior food insecurity throughout the state.

- AB 152: This bill establishes a State Emergency Food Assistance Program that would allow local food banks throughout the state to purchase fresh, California-grown produce to distribute to low-income households. California farmers can receive a 10 percent tax credit on the wholesale value of fresh produce that they donate to qualified California non-profits, including food banks. This bill intends to increase access to healthy fruits and vegetables and reduce food insecurity for families in low-income communities.
- AB 402: The *Hunger Free Kids Act* encourages increased participation in CalFRESH by allowing school districts to share student information with county human services departments throughout the state. This data sharing will assist human services departments in identifying more non-participating households that qualify for CalFRESH and help to outreach to and expand the number of children and families in need receiving federal nutrition assistance.
- AB 581: The *California Healthy Food Financing Initiative* aims to increase healthy food access in “food desert” communities by establishing the Healthy Food Financing Initiative Fund through federal, state and private contributions. The fund will provide financial support for the development of grocery stores, farm stands, community gardens, and other produce retail outlets attempting to locate in underserved communities that lack access to affordable, quality and nutritious food. The bill also mandates that recommendations on improving healthy food access in California be presented to the legislature by July 2012 and, based on the availability of funds, requires the implementation of these recommendations.
- AB 183: This bill prohibits the sale of alcoholic beverages at self-service checkouts in the state. The bill attempts to reduce access to alcoholic beverages by under-aged youth and already intoxicated adults by requiring a live cashier to sell these beverages.
- AB 1319: AB 1319 prohibits the sale, manufacturing, or distribution of any food, liquid, or beverage container made with Bisphenol-A (BPA) that is intended for children ages 3 and younger. This bill would reduce California children’s exposure to the harmful toxin BPA, which has been linked to cognitive, behavioral, and reproductive abnormalities.
- AB 688: This bill prohibits retailers from selling baby formula, food, or pharmaceuticals that have

exceeded the indicated “use by” date. This bill is intended to reduce infant consumption of food or drugs at potentially unintended nutrient and chemical levels and protects consumers from purchasing unsafe or ineffective products intended for infant consumption.

- AB 938: This bill requires the full translation of emergency drinking water notices in Spanish and all other languages that are primarily spoken by at least 10% of a local population. This bill intends to ensure proper notification and equal access to information about unsafe drinking water levels for all California residents.

For more information on these and other bills, please visit the State of California Legislative Council at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html>.

Upcoming Events

Community of Heroes Celebration. *Thursday, November 10th, 2011. 6-10pm.* Center at Cathedral Plaza, 555 West Temple, Los Angeles, CA 90011.

Join us as we celebrate nearly twenty years advocating for underserved communities and thank five heroes of healthcare. The **Community of Heroes Celebration** honors these distinguished champions:

- Dr. Robert Tranquada, *Emeritus Professor of Medicine & Public Policy*, USC, a leader and architect for quality healthcare for the uninsured
- Dr. David Carlisle, *President*, Charles Drew University of Medicine & Science (formerly Director of OSHPD) for improving the quality of care across California through innovations in data collection and analysis
- Dr. Hector Flores, *Medical Director*, White Memorial Medical Center, for his visionary work in creating an integrated system of care for low-income and uninsured populations
- Sylvia Drew Ivie, *Founder*, South Los Angeles Community Kitchen, for her pioneering work in a full range of challenges from HIV/AIDS to healthy nutrition
- Ken Kutcher, *Principal*, Harding Larmore Kutcher & Kozal, for his courage and leadership in advancing environmental regulations to protect the health and safety of the community.

More information and ticket purchases are available through our website at www.chc-inc.org/chc.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ... CONTACT
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