

## Three Threats in Congress to Texas Health Care: Issues to Watch and Speak Out On

### 1) Federal Budget for 2007

What's Up: The U.S House is debating its Fiscal 2007 budget resolution and will attempt to vote after they return from their two-week Easter recess.

Why it Matters:

- The House resolution does not include money to fill next year's expected federal shortfall in State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- It also does not include the funds needed to extend Transitional Medicaid (TMA) for families moving from welfare to work.
- The Senate resolution approved last month does include money for CHIP and TMA.
- The House budget resolution is about \$10 billion short of the level needed to maintain current services for discretionary programs (cuts to child care, food assistance, education).
- Conservatives are demanding a floor vote on changes to the budget process, including a Line-Item Veto Act (H.R. 4890/S. 2381) to give the President wide-ranging authority to cut entitlement programs like Medicare, Medicaid and CHIP.

To Learn More: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities ([www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)); Coalition on Human Needs ([www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org)).

### 2) Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization Act (S.1955, by Enzi)

What's Up: This bill was approved by the Senate HELP Committee on a party line vote on Wednesday, March 15. Vote by full Senate may come as the first week of May.

Why it Matters:

- Would override all existing state laws that guarantee coverage of health benefits in group insurance plans, such as cancer screenings, diabetes supplies and services, well-baby care, immunizations, prenatal care, pregnancy complications, serious mental illness, and coverage of newborns and adopted children.
- Also overrides laws that limit premium discrimination based on health status, age, and sex; premium rate controls on small group insurance, and standards for honest insurance marketing practices.
- Statements of concern or opposition have been made by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, American Cancer Society, American Diabetes Association, and national Mental Health Association.

To Learn More: Families USA has information and links at [www.familiesusa.org](http://www.familiesusa.org).

### 3) Immigration Bills

What's Up: The House has already passed a bill, HR 4437 by Sensenbrenner, and the Senate Judiciary Committee has adopted a very different bipartisan bill by Chairman Specter, while Majority Leader Frist has offered a more restrictive bill of his own.

Why it Matters: (from a health care perspective only)

- The House bill would expand the definition of criminal "alien smuggling" in a way that anyone who assists an undocumented person, e.g., by providing health care or social services, could be charged with a criminal offense. The bill has no "safe harbors" or exceptions (even in emergencies) to prevent safety net medical care providers, or religious or humanitarian workers from prosecution.
- The Senate Judiciary bill specifically clarifies that humanitarian aid and emergency care are not a crime, and also protects provision of non-emergency medical care, counseling, victims' services and housing.
- Texas health care providers, especially hospitals, currently can be paid for many emergency care services they provide to undocumented persons through a special Medicaid program. Some versions of guest worker programs proposed would classify the workers in a way that would deny hospitals these payments. While it is unlikely that any immigration bill will fully address guest workers' health care needs, it is important that any new law not further undermine the health care safety net by taking away critical Medicaid funding.

To Learn More: <http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/CIR/cir010.htm>