



APHA–SA Action Committee Newsletter

June 2005

Greetings from the Action Committee Co-Chairs!

The spring semester has ended, summer has arrived, and I'm sure, when a free moment arises, many of you are basking in the sun. Summer can be a hectic time of year for students, whether you're interning, traveling, or taking summer classes; but your voice is needed now more than ever. Government funding of healthcare services is facing drastic budget cuts that will be felt at all levels. I challenge every one of you to take 15 minutes a week to advocate for issues you believe are important. Our Congressional members are in office for a reason; to represent the voice of the people. So let yourself be heard!

We Want to Hear From YOU!

The Action Committee is here to listen to your legislative concerns, whether they are on the local, state, or federal level. We want you to make your voice heard. If you do not have the time to write an article, or are just too timid, send the Action Committee a short email detailing your concerns and suggestions you have for addressing the issue. We will do everything in our power to teach you how to become an effective advocate, including walking you through the process of writing to your representatives.

Healthcare and Information Technology: Health TEQ Act of 2005

Take a moment to think about how technology has changed communication, education, and even shopping over the past thirty years. Although developments in those areas are amazing, the discoveries in biomedical technology and information technology seem virtually incomprehensible. We've all seen the improvements in medical technology over the past several decades, such as magnetic resonance imaging machines and computed axial tomography. Now imagine the benefits of a secure health information technology system utilizing a universal set of standards capable of reducing costs, enhancing efficiency, and improving the quality of patient care. Bill Frist (R-TN) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY) began to lay the foundation for such a system when they introduced the "Health Technology to Enhance Quality Act of 2005" on June 16th, a bipartisan bill which provides for infrastructure development and creation of universal standards.

In order to implement electronic health information systems much work must be done to ensure security and interoperability. Such a system would provide a plethora of benefits to the healthcare system, which include reducing medical errors, reducing costs, simplifying administrative tasks, and



increasing competition.¹ According to Senator Frist, “Grounding our health care in information technology can out waste and redundancies that drive up costs, hamper efficiency and cause medical errors” and “help ensure high quality health care is available and affordable for all Americans.”² I urge everyone to write their representatives and let them know how you feel about the Health TEQ Act of 2005 (S.1262).

Sources:

1. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/F?c109:1:./temp/~c109L1d5Tw:e392:>
2. <http://clinton.senate.gov/~clinton/news/2005/2005616707.html>

Tell the President and Department of Justice Not to Let Big Tobacco Off the Hook!

In September 1999, the federal government filed a landmark lawsuit against cigarette companies that seeks to hold them legally accountable for years of illegal and harmful practices including withholding the health risk of smoking and marketing to children. The trial began on September 21, 2004 and has lasted until June 9, 2005.

In this lawsuit the government requested that the judge impose several remedies including a recommended 25-year, \$130 billion program to help smokers quit. Astonishingly, during the government’s final argument, they requested only a 5-year, \$10 billion program.

APHA believes that this change is offensive and places the financial interests of the industry above fighting this nation’s leading cause of death.

Judge Kessler has given the government a deadline of June 25, 2005 to submit a proposed remedies order which will detail all of the remedies it is seeking.

Action Needed

Click on the link below to send a letter to President George W. Bush and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales urging them to insist on the strong remedies recommended by their own expert witness, including fundamental reform of the industry’s harmful marketing practices; the establishment of a well funded, sustained, nationwide program to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit; and impose financial penalties against tobacco companies should they continue these practices.

Take Action Now!

http://capwiz.com/apha/mail/oneclick_compose/?alertid=7743501



Abortion A Special Election Issue in California

The Parents' Right to Know measure will appear on the next statewide special election ballot in California, a measure which would create a state constitutional amendment requiring physicians to notify a parent or guardian 48 hours before they perform an abortion on an unmarried minor, and would impose civil penalties on individuals who coerce a minor to have an abortion. If passed, the state Department of Health Services would be required to maintain detailed records of abortions performed on minors.

It is a measure that is likely to appeal to parents of adolescent girls from both sides of the abortion debate, but at what price? Opponents say that it will seriously reduce access to and use of abortion services for this high-risk age group, instead of creating effective parent-teen interaction on these sensitive issues.

On April 13, initiative supporters submitted more than 950,000 signatures to qualify the measure for the next statewide ballot, exceeding the 598,105 valid signatures needed. On May 16 the Secretary of State's Office announced that the signatures were accepted and the measure will appear on the next election ballot.

The measure is sponsored by anti-abortion organization Life on the Ballot, spearheaded by newspaper publisher Jim Holman and longtime anti-abortion advocate and spokesman Albin Rhomberg. Supporters have said the measure is necessary to ensure no teen has an abortion who is not emotionally equipped to deal with the consequences.

Despite its wide sponsorship by anti-abortion groups and social conservatives, the Sacramento Bee reports that such a measure "would bring out voters on both sides of (the) state's continuing battle over a woman's right to abortion." The idea that a minor in school could be taken to an abortion clinic without the parents knowing may be a concern for a lot of parents on either side of the abortion issue. Thus critics and supporters alike are agreeing that this measure has broad constituency.

Some experts though, speculate a significant reduction in access to abortion services in California. The California Legislative Analyst's Office estimates the measure would reduce the number of abortions performed in the state by 25 percent.

Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California and the national Feminist Majority Foundation are already gearing up their constituencies to fight the initiative, calling it an "unsafe and inappropriate intrusion by government into families' private lives." Planned Parenthood has said, "We want to encourage good family communication and we don't see this initiative as something that can force families to communicate about sensitive issues such as this."



Surprisingly, the criticism is not just coming from the abortion rights arena. Anti-abortion advocates are concerned this particular measure is not the best strategy for reducing adolescents' access to abortion services. The measure wasn't the only abortion notification measure attempting qualification for the ballot this year. The Parental Notification campaign pulled its petition efforts once it became obvious that supporting two initiatives was jeopardizing their shared goal.

The two measures were nearly identical, except the Parents' Right to Know version has additional reporting requirements and audits. Those additions have some anti-abortion experts concerned about its ability to eventually pass, as they believe the reporting requirements will raise red flags with privacy advocates.

In addition, the coercion provision of the measure critics believe may open the document to a legal challenge, saying it violates a California law which limits initiatives to a single subject.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has not come out strongly for or against this measure, lest he distract from his own special election agenda. Schwarzenegger's press secretary stated the governor "supports the concept but has not endorsed the proposal."

Written By: Amy Carroll, MPH

Carroll is a doctoral student in Community Health Sciences at the UCLA School of Public Health, member of the UCLA Legislative Watch and Student Action Committee, and Student Liaison to the Community Health Planning and Policy Development Section of APHA.

Sources:

1. <http://www.lifeontheballot.org/pages/1/index.htm>
2. http://www.christianexaminer.com/Articles/Articles%20Mar05/Art_Mar05_sc1.html
3. <http://www.parentalnotification.org/>
4. <http://www.sacbee.com/content/politics/ca/election/story/12631706p-13485572c.html>
5. <http://www.sacbee.com/content/politics/story/12905960p-13754473c.html>
6. <http://www.californiahealthline.org/index.cfm?Action=dspItem&itemID=108898>
7. <http://www.californiahealthline.org/index.cfm?Action=dspItem&itemID=110077>
8. <http://www.californiahealthline.org/index.cfm?Action=dspItem&itemID=110077&classcd=CL353>
9. <http://www.californiahealthline.org/index.cfm?Action=dspItem&itemID=110205&classcd=CL353>

American Public Health Association 133rd Annual Meeting & Exposition

This conference will be held from November 5-9, 2005 in New Orleans, LA. This year's focus is on Evidence-Based Policy and Practice, and is expected to be enlightening and exiting. Senator John Kerry has been invited to speak, as well as Dr. J. Michael McGinnis. We will also be hearing from our fellow students who are presenting! Please note that those seeking CHES credits can receive up to 40 Category 1 contact hours in health education.



The annual meeting and exposition will provide other opportunities for learning as well: full or half day pre-convention continuing education institutes that focus on Law Literacy for Public Health Practitioners, or the Children's Health Survey, Spatial Epidemiology and GIS, as well as many more. Visit www.apha.org/meetings to register early, you can save \$115 if you register by August 26th.

New Student Assembly Website!

Towards the end of the summer, the APHA-SA will present a new face; our website will be up to date, and the Action Committee will have a discussion board where members can share their thoughts and ideas about current public health policies.

Call for Articles!

APHA-SA members are welcome to submit articles to Kate Maggioncalda (kem2108@columbia.edu) or Greg Summerville (gsummer84@gmail.com) via email by the 20th of every month. The article can be about any health policy issue occurring at any level of government; local, state or federal. Help others learn about what's going on in your area! I would like to thank those who already submitted articles!