



## Budget and Appropriations

This fall is geared up to be an exciting time from a legislative standpoint. Congress has delayed passage of the necessary twelve appropriations bills for fiscal year (FY) 2016 that fund the government, long-term funding for the Federal Highway Trust Fund, and it must act in order to lift the debt ceiling before defaulting on the government's credit. FY 2015 ends on September 30th, but with twelve days on the legislative calendar combined with shortened days due to the Jewish High Holidays and a visit from the Pope, legislators will be forced to implement a short-term stop-gap measure known as a continuing resolution (CR) in order to fund the federal government beyond September. When Democrats and Republicans come to the negotiating table, both will be hampered by the automatic spending cuts from 2013 known as sequestration, which put across-the-board spending caps on non-defense and defense spending.

Democrats and Republicans have drawn lines in the sand on a number of issues. Republicans have tried to add funding for basic defense appropriations programs. President Obama vowed to veto any appropriations bill that funds defense spending without also adding to non-defense funding. Additionally, in light of a controversial undercover video discussing abortion practices, conservative Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate have vowed to oppose any appropriations funding measure that contains funding for Planned Parenthood, while the White House has stated it in turn will veto any appropriations bill that removes funding for Planned Parenthood. With these partisan appropriations fights from both sides looming, coupled with the debt-ceiling deadline and the highway trust fund expiring at the end of October, legislators will have their hands full in order to avoid a government shutdown. Stay tuned to see how this all ends up for important nursing education and training programs.

## Health Care Reform Implementation

Since our last update, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the federal government in the case *King v. Burwell*. The Court ruled that tax credits and subsidies obtained under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) are available for use in the 37 states with a federally administered health insurance marketplace. The law appears to be successful in lowering the number of uninsured, as a July Gallup poll indicates that the percentage of uninsured people in the U.S. continues to decline. Since a third quarter peak of 18% in 2013, the uninsured rate has dropped to 11.9% in the first quarter of 2015. The poll attributes the drop in uninsured to the ACA, an improving economy, and falling unemployment. The biggest gains in coverage were seen among young adults and minorities. 2.3 million people gained insurance when the law expanded coverage to those under 26, and 14.1 million through expansion under Medicaid. Minorities, such as Latinos, saw immense gains, where the uninsured rate dropped from 29% in 2012 to nearly 17% today.

## Payment, Practice and Regulatory Issues

On June 30, 2015, Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA-33) and 17 other Members of Congress sent a letter to the Office of Management and Budget, requesting that they release the proposed Food and Drug Administration rule, "General and Plastic Surgery Devices: Restriction of Sunlamp Product," for public comment. Rep. Lieu was joined by Congressional Skin Cancer Caucus co-chairs Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN-5), Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY-12), Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA-15), and Rep. David Joyce (R-OH-14), among others including Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT-3). The proposed rule was received by OMB on October 1, 2014 and would further regulate tanning bed use. Rep. DeLauro has been particularly vocal in advocating for restriction of tanning bed use, going so far as to call on Congress to implement a national age minimum of 18, mirroring limits imposed on tobacco product use for minors. Meanwhile, tanning bed use in the U.S. has dropped approximately 1.3% between 2010 and 2013, based on data collected by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. Advocacy efforts, combined with a 10% excise tax on tanning services as part of the ACA, are attributed to the decline.

## Advocacy in Action

The Title VIII Nursing Programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are important to our mission of promoting excellence in the field of nursing and dermatologic care. As Congress continues its work on appropriations bills for FY 2016, please consider calling your Senators and Representative to voice your support for these programs. As social media becomes an ever-more important aspect of our lives, Members of Congress are using these innovative tools on a more frequent basis to reach out to constituents. Nearly every Member of Congress has a social media account, so also consider voicing your opinions through Facebook and Twitter while following their accounts to stay informed. Increased funding for these vital programs is only possible through your hard work and advocacy. A robust campaign on social media, coupled with conversations with your friends to do the same, is a great way to engage with your federal legislators and educate them about these important issues. Your voice and thoughts are invaluable, as Members of Congress will seek input from you, their constituents, in the busy appropriations season of the 114th Congress. Thank you for your advocacy.

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