

Lawmakers predict health insurance bills will top agenda

By Jodi Feldman
Washington Correspondent

At the start of the 1991 congressional session, AAP News asked members of Congress who hold key child health policy positions to respond to three questions on national health policy. Their responses follow.

Other members of Congress were profiled in the February issue of Washington Update. Additional responses will appear in future issues.

Which areas of health policy do you expect Congress will address this session?

Sen. Tom Harkin
(D-Iowa)
Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Funding

Increased access to health- and long-term care will receive increased attention this session. Furthermore, Part H of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 99-457) is due for reauthorization along with health education and training programs, the preventive services block grant and other programs of relevance to the health and well-being of children.

Sen. Bob Kerrey
(D-Nebraska)

This session of Congress promises to be one in which the discussion of basic issues relating to how our nation finances and delivers health care services comes to the forefront. While the focus of this discussion will most likely center on how to extend access to health services to the approximately 37 million Americans currently lacking coverage, I would hope that we broaden the scope of our discussion to include fundamental issues that underlie



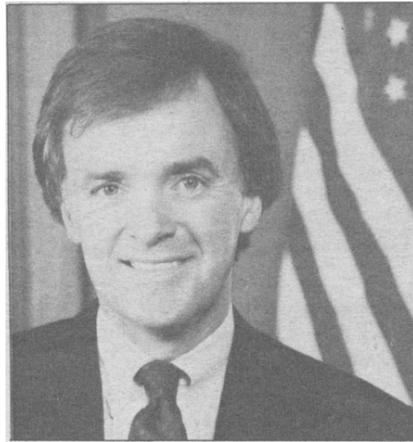
Sen. Harkin: focusing on access.

why a growing number of Americans, including children, lack access to services, and how we can better control rising health care costs.

I believe it will become increasingly apparent in the coming years that fundamental reform of our health care system is needed to meet our health care needs rather than continued tinkering at the margins of the current system. This comprehensive approach is one that I have adopted in a health care reform proposal, Health USA, that I intend to introduce this year. Other areas that Congress will consider may include: malpractice reform, optional state expansion of Medicaid eligibility to 185 percent of the Federal poverty level and immunizations for children.

Rep. Edward Madigan
(R-15th District, Ill.)
Ranking Republican Member of the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment (Energy and Commerce Committee)
Note: Rep. Madigan's nomination as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture is pending.

The list of child health issues for this Congress is extensive, and will



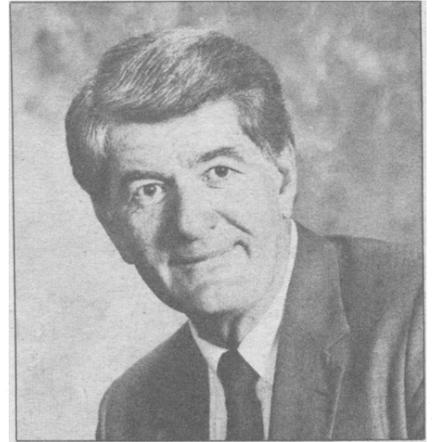
Sen. Kerrey: sees major reforms.

probably include issues such as legislation that will provide basic health benefits for all Americans; examination and regulation of the small business market for health insurance; regulation of long-term care insurance products; expansion of the beneficiary eligibility in the Medicaid program; and reauthorization of the Health Professions Education program.

Of the many health threats facing today's children, which do you think can be addressed through federal legislation?

Sen. Harkin

Of the health threats facing children today, those which will most certainly need to be addressed through federal legislation are those which cut across regions, agencies and programs, whether at federal, state or local levels. With an estimated 8 million to 10 million children without any health insurance, I believe that the preeminent threat to children's health is access to care. Lack of access to care extends beyond acute health issues to long-term care, to educational services and to preventive care. In each of these areas, federal policies must be established and



Rep. Madigan: back to the basics.

effectively extended to children. I believe that we must focus our attention on the first of our national education goals: that every child start school ready to learn. Therefore, if we are not to jeopardize our most important investment in the future, we must assure every child a healthy start.

Sen. Kerrey

2) There are numerous issues that plague the health status of our nation's children that I believe Congress should address through legislation. The two areas that I believe are most pressing and that would go farthest toward improving the health and well-being of our children are: 1) developing a comprehensive plan to reduce the number of children lacking health insurance coverage; and 2) developing coordinated and integrated approaches to meet the varied medical and social needs of children. Access to timely, adequate and quality primary and preventive health services must be assured to all pregnant women, infants and children. While access to these services should be a goal for our entire population, this particular population, due to the importance these services

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Congressman, advocate Conte dies

Rep. Silvio O. Conte (R-Mass.), a leading advocate for child health programs, died on Feb. 9. He was 69.

Conte was the ranking minority member of the House Appropriations Committee and the subcommittee that oversees health funding. In the 1980s, Conte worked to increase the NIH budget by nearly 100 percent and defeat significant public health spending cuts proposed by the Reagan Administration.

In 1976, Conte received the AAP Excellence in Public Service Award for his efforts in securing passage of an amendment to increase funds for the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Crippled Children's programs. He was one of the key child health lawmakers profiled in the February 1991 issue of AAP News.

Coalition calls for adequate funds to treat pediatric AIDS

The Washington-based Pediatric AIDS Coalition has recommended that Congress take action on 41 specific initiatives to ensure that lawmakers respond to the needs of children who are HIV-infected or at risk of HIV infection. The recommendations are outlined in the coalition's 1991 legislative agenda which has been distributed to every member of Congress.

"Although treatment advances are helping HIV-infected children live longer, there is concern that inadequate funding for services may limit access to the care and resources they and their families need," said Gwendolyn Scott, M.D., vice-chairwoman of the AAP Task Force on Pediatric AIDS.

The coalition recommendations address the following areas: preventing the incidence of HIV infection in children and pregnant women; providing substance abuse prevention and treatment services for pregnant women; increasing federal funds for biomedical AIDS research; reducing the barriers to access to comprehensive health care for families with HIV infection and AIDS; expanding developmental and social service programs to include HIV-infected families; and improving the coordination of federal programs that

address the needs of HIV-infected children and women.

In 1990, the coalition focused its efforts on securing passage of the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Emergency (CARE) Act which was the only major AIDS legislation passed by Congress last year. The \$221 million appropriated to implement the CARE bill fell short of the full authorizing level of \$875 million.

"The Pediatric AIDS Coalition convinced Congress to earmark 15 percent of the CARE bill funds specifically for HIV-infected infants and children," said Susan Campbell, co-chairwoman of the coalition and an assistant director of the AAP Department of Government Liaison. "This year, the coalition will push for full funding of the CARE bill, and expansion of drug abuse prevention and treatment programs for pregnant women and comprehensive services for children with prenatal exposure to drugs and HIV infection."

A 24 percent increase in overall pediatric AIDS cases and a 40 percent increase in cases among children ages birth to 13 years was reported between 1989-1990, compared to a 15 percent increase among adult AIDS cases. Women and children now represent 12

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