



# Tidbits from Sacramento

*Griffin & Associates*  
*Legislative and Governmental Advocacy*  
*"We Open Doors - We Get Results"*

1121 L Street, Suite 210 • Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 448-9275 • [www.mjgriffin.com](http://www.mjgriffin.com)

March 24, 2007 – Issue #2

## **HEALTH CARE REFORM – WHERE IS IT GOING OR IS IT?**

I don't believe there are any answers at this point. However, movement has been detected in the last week. On March 21, the Governor's Office convened a work group to discuss the various components of the proposals to cover California's uninsured. Primary among the proposals are the five that get the most press, including the Governor's, and the leaders of the Senate and Assembly Republicans and Democrats.

This was the first meeting of what has been billed as an on-going effort to try and find consensus on a number of challenging issues. This will not be an easy task. On a positive note, this meeting included numerous key legislative staff, and stakeholders representing hospitals, physicians, nurses, health plans, labor, insurance and consumer groups. In future meetings, the group will be divided into two distinct groups; one focusing on coverage and the other focusing on cost-containment. Specific subjects that the groups will address initially include the individual mandates, public program changes, purchasing pools, enforcement and funding. This list will grow as the discussions move forward. Each group will be meeting at least two days per week. This is a major commitment of time for all participating in this endeavor.

To try and put some additional perspective on this effort, I will share with you the experience I had on March 20<sup>th</sup>. As many of you know, I am very involved in the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) at the national, state and local levels. Health care is the number one issue at all three levels of the organization. As VP of Public Policy for the California Chapters, I put together a health care panel for the March 20<sup>th</sup> NAWBO-CA Board meeting to discuss four of the proposals. This was one of the best panels we have had for some time. Senator George Runner, Assistant Secretary of Health & Human Services Ruth Liu, Senior Assembly Consultant Deborah Kelch and Senate Senior Consultant Agnes Lee were the presenters. While each proposal included many different components, it was very clear that they were all quite willing to speak about the need to work together. This panel exhibited a collegiality on a tough issue that I had not seen in years. We also met with the Governor's staff later in the afternoon and found the same willingness to work together.

There are elements of the Workers' Compensation Reform in what I am witnessing. It took strong leadership and the willingness to work together beyond partisanship to make Workers' Comp reform happen. Could health care reform follow suit? What is expressed at every level is that we have a broken health care system and it needs to be "fixed."

If answers are found and there is a continued willingness to work together, perhaps we can get a bill that will have the framework with implementation dates, but not only will lengthy dialogues need to continue, but compromises between various stakeholders will need to be made – never watch sausage or laws being made. This one will be difficult!!

## **LEGISLATURE BEGINS TO MOVE INTO HIGH GEAR**

Policy and budget committees have much heavier schedules this week. Some of the more controversial policy issues include:

- Global Warming Implementation -AB 32 of 2006 – Joint Hearing, Assembly Policy & Budget Committees - Concerns slow implementation of the legislation.
- Implementation of SB 437 - New Department of Public Health, Senate Budget Committee. Budget staff will be looking at the transition and how it is going to be implemented by July 1, 2007.
- SB 200, 201,202 (Florez) – Food Safety leafy green vegetables – Senate Agriculture Committee. There are still questions relative to the contaminated spinach grown in California, how do we avoid the problem.
- AB 374 Compassionate Choice Act (Berg) – Special Order – Assembly Judiciary Committee. Strong support from Ca. Commission on Aging, Older Women’s League and several other Senior groups and strong opposition from the Ca. Disabilities Alliance, Foundation of Independent. Living Centers, CMA, Calif. Hospice Assn and religious organizations and hospitals.
- AB 246, (Torrico), AB 554 (Hernandez) – Assembly Public Employees Retirement & Social Security Committee – benefits and retirement boards. These issues will generate a great deal of interest and controversy.
- SB 549 (Corbett) – Employee’s right to bereavement leave – Senate Labor & Industrial Relations Committee. Provides for four days leave for specific persons.

In addition, the budget committees of both houses will have a full schedule beginning March 26 and going forward. The budget deadline is June 15<sup>th</sup>, but usually we see the budget signed later depending on how many controversial issues are still unresolved. More as the budget unfolds.

### **PROFILE – SENATOR SHEILA KUEHL**

Senator Kuehl was elected to the Senate in 2000 and again in 2004. Under current law, she will be “termed out” next year. Senator Kuehl also served six years in the Assembly prior to her election to the Senate. She was the first woman in California to be named Speaker pro Tempore of the Assembly during her tenure. Senator Kuehl is currently Chair of the Senate Health Committee and sits on several other committees, including the Senate Appropriations Committee which reviews all bills with any state costs. She is a strong proponent of Universal Health Care and has authored SB 840.

Senator Kuehl represents the 23<sup>rd</sup> Senate District which includes a large part of West Los Angeles and part of Ventura County. She is a former civil rights attorney and law professor. Senator Kuehl graduated from Harvard Law School in 1978. During that time, she was the second woman in the school’s history to win the Moot Court competition.

We also know her as the irrepressible Zelda Gilroy in the long ago television series, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*.”

### **Mini Tidbits**

- Last week 24 Assembly Democrats and 8 Assembly Republicans went to Washington DC seeking, as usual more federal funding. California rarely gets its “fair share.” Key dollar issues were incarceration of illegal immigrants and research and development of alternative fuels. The mood was positive, but time will tell!
- Secretary of Health & Human Services, Mike Leavitt’s visit to California was certainly good news for the Governor and his health care proposal. Leavitt announced California would get \$3.45 billion in increased funds for Medi-Cal.

- The Governor also sent a message to the President and to Congress last week asking that they develop proposals to allow markets and consumers to determine the types of alternative fuels, not settle for any certain technology.
- The Legislative Analyst's Office recently released a report promoting widespread adoption of health information technology which may not only improve the quality of health care, but also reduce costs.
- Can workers compensation treatment become part of the regular health care system? Discussions are beginning. Check out Senator Kuehl's SB 840. She has a provision in there to investigate ways to coordinate these two health care systems. More as it unfolds.
- Assembly Republicans released their version of health care reform earlier this month. They have 18 bills they believe will increase access to health care without new mandates, tax hikes or government programs.
- Pete Stark, Chairman of the House Ways & Means Health Subcommittee indicated in a recent hearing, that he has concerns with the Medicare Advantage Plans.. The concern raised is that Medicare is losing money for every person who enrolls in a private plan. More hearings on this are expected.
- The Governor signed, SB 113 (Calderon R) on March 15, the bill to move California's Primary Presidential Election to February 5, 2008. Not a surprise, but time will tell the impact financially and politically.