

Weekly Report: 8/1 – 8/5
Olivia Pham

Monday August 1, 2016

Darren Webb – Office of Congressman Sam Johnson

Mr. Webb had only been with Rep. Johnson for a little more than a week when we met with him, however, he was more than willing to discuss the upcoming health policy agenda and the office's position on healthcare. Since Rep. Johnson is such a senior member, he has his hand in many health policy issues. Some of these include the PACE Act, Association health plans, veterans' health, and identity theft (in relation to Medicare). Mr. Webb, after detailing his path to the Hill, shared several names with us and emphasized the importance of political mindedness while working on the hill. This was a very informative meeting, especially in a very senior office.

Sohini Gupta – Mehlman Castagnetti Rosen Bingel & Thomas

When we met with Ms. Gupta she had just come back from the DNC, and it was immediately obvious that she is passionate about health policy. We spoke at length about her career on the Hill, including her time with Sen. Bayh and her work on the ACA. She encouraged us to continue pursuing Medicare policy interests since it will be huge in the coming years. She also said we should look to long-term care, telehealth, and MACRA implementation for interesting work. Finally, she recommended we go to committee for placement.

Brad Smith – FasterCures, Milken Institute

Dr. Smith described the work of FasterCures to us, and I was interested to find that his work focused more on health policy than science and drug policy. He personally is focused on formularies, NIH/FDA funding, and is putting together a package for the presidential transition. We also spoke at length about biodefense and the role of the life sciences in defense. He stated that biodefense was originally thought of as infectious disease prevention for US soldiers stationed around the world, but now the focus has shifted to terrorist attacks.

Tuesday August 2, 2016

Emily Mueller – Office of Senator Pat Roberts

Our meeting with Ms. Mueller was quite pleasant. After going through her previous experience, we spoke about the health policy priorities of the office. These include drug user fee agreements, 21st century cures, Medicare extenders, CHIP extension, and rural

health. Sen. Roberts sits on many committees, and at times this creates conflict when one committee does not agree with the policies of another. Sen. Roberts tries his best to connect the committees and work through any roadblocks, but most conflict resolution falls on staff. A positive aspect of being on so many committees are the sheer number of stakeholders that would like to collaborate and work with the Senator.

Bonnie Washington, Susan Zook – Aetna

Ms. Washington and Ms. Zook were really open and about their experiences on the Hill. It was especially fascinating to learn about Ms. Washington, since she worked at CMS and OMB at such an early age. We discussed how policy-making on the hill is different from policy creation in the private sector, especially regarding bureaucracy. They also spoke at length about the Aetna-Humana merger and how it has impacted their congressional outreach.

Lisa Grabert – Committee on Ways and Means (Majority)

Ms. Grabert is really passionate about Medicare Part A. She has a good understanding of how higher leadership can affect the committee. She also spoke about her role in writing the Ryan health care plan, which she said was never meant to be one sweeping policy reform. It was always meant to be a series of smaller, more attainable wins. On a different note, this meeting was held in the Ways and Means hearing chamber which was really beautiful. It was the first time I had ever seen it.

Wednesday August 3, 2016

Jeanne Lambrew – Office of Health Reform, HHS

This was a shorter meeting (30 minutes) but in this time we were able to learn about Ms. Lambrew's role in creating and implementing the ACA. Having been with President Obama from the very beginning of his administration, she described her work on the transition team and in the Office of Health Reform as "the position of a lifetime". She described all of the milestones of the ACA, and I was struck by the "big picture" view she was able to have of the ACA as part of the President's team. She was truly honored to have served in the OHR as well as on the Domestic Policy Council, and her words really inspired me to continue pursuing a career that I can look back on with pride.

Nick Bath – Senate HELP Committee

This was my second meeting with Mr. Bath, which I attended alone to gain a better understanding of how I would fit in as a fellow. We pinpointed some key areas of interest, and I've decided that if I was placed here I'd like to focus on the ACA and CHIP, with secondary interest in drug user fee agreements, and then a desire to pick up

any remaining public health work. Mr. Bath and I had a pleasant chat and I will be following up with his professional staff later this week.

Ashley Thompson, Megan Cundari, Staff – American Hospital Association

Our meeting with Ms. Thompson and Ms. Cundari was especially candid, which I think helped us learn so much about the positions of the AHA. They spoke briefly about their backgrounds, and then proceeded to talk about AHA and its priorities. It's amazing that AHA has so much policy work that they have two separate teams: one for policy development, one for congressional outreach. These two teams often collaborate. Seeing these powerful groups and trying to understand how they operate is fascinating – it's a very carefully coordinated dance to fairly represent all types of hospitals while effecting change at the federal and state level.

Dr. Robert Saunders, Andrea Thoumi - Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy

Dr. Saunders and Ms. Thoumi explained to us the mission of Margolis, and talked individually about their work. Dr. Saunders, having been on the Hill for several years before joining Margolis, works in payments delivery reform while Ms. Thoumi looks at APMs around the world. It was very interesting to hear how their research was based in other countries, but the ultimate goal is to apply that research to US policy. We asked if this ever caused people to overlook their work, to which they replied affirmatively. The overall aim of their policy work is to eventually convince congress and other stakeholders that the global perspective is valuable.

Thursday August 4, 2016

Commonwealth Fund

In their beautifully historic headquarters, we met with the Commonwealth Fund in two groups. The first group consisted of Munira Gunja, Dr. Pam Riley, and Dr. Eric Schneider. They gave us a brief overview of the health policy priorities of the Fund and subsequently described their role on the health team. It was really interesting to hear how they operate as a privately funded group, and how they not only conduct research but also provide grants. This allows them to take an active role in health policy and drive their own agenda.

United Hospital Fund

Preface: Kripa and I were quite late to this meeting because we went to the wrong 1411 Broadway street. As Midwestern yokels, we did not know that you have to include the name of the neighborhood in a street address. As such, we ended up at 1411 Broadway in Astoria, asking ourselves whether or not UHF could possibly be located in the high

school across the street. Luckily, we stopped to ask for directions, and were directed to the correct location near Times Square.

Our meeting at UHF was more a roundtable with several of their Medicare, Medicaid, aging, and payment model experts. They each described their work at UHF and why it was important to the city. I was really struck by how much public health work is done in NYC, and how it can be an excellent place to pilot new programs.

Chad Shearer – Former Fellow, United Hospital Fund

Chad was kind enough to take us to dinner where we had a wonderful conversation about his experience on the Hill and beyond. I got the sense that Chad left the Hill because he felt he wasn't really effecting change, and that UHF was much better suited to him because he was able to pursue his own health policy interests. He also spoke at length about the importance of learning how to prepare for hearings, which is something we have not spoken about before with former fellows. This was a great meeting!

Friday August 5, 2016

Tour of NYU College of Global Health

Our "tour" was not really a tour so much as a sit-down meeting with Jennifer Pomeranz, interim director of the College of Global Health. This was a really great meeting because we were able to discuss public health policy at length, especially in food policy and its importance to safety net programs. Ms. Pomeranz taught us about two important issues which she tries to impress on her students. First, that there needs to be more program evaluation from the government. If any programs are implemented, the funding to evaluate them should be included. Second, federal preemption of the states should not lower the standards of any policy, but instead set a baseline on which states can build. I wholeheartedly agree and am encouraged to find that other public health professionals share the concerns I have with health policy.

Martin Sobel – Former Fellow, Marwood Group

We met Martin in NYC for a great lunch and really fascinating discussion. Martin, as part of the Marwood Group, works with private investors to analyze and assess the health policy market. This is an area of health policy I am completely unfamiliar with, and I was surprised to find it did not involve any financial models. He projects purely from a policy standpoint. Martin also gave us his advice on how to be successful congressional staffers, and strongly suggested we consider member's offices in addition to committee staff.