

## Legislative Report #5, February 24, 2013

The General Assembly will reconvene Monday, February 25 for Day 23 and be in session through Friday, March 1, which will be Day 27.

**Rural Health Day** – The Georgia Rural Health Association held Rural Health Day at the Capitol on Wednesday February 20<sup>th</sup>. Thank you for a successful day! To view the Rural Health Day visual slide show click [here](#).

**Amended Budget** – The state’s FY 2013 \$19.3 billion Amended Budget which ends June 30<sup>th</sup> passed the Senate this week by a vote of 49-0. The spending plan fills a hole of more than \$200 million in the state’s health care program for the poor, elderly and disabled. A joint conference committee will now work on a compromise between the House and Senate versions. To read HB 105, the Amended budget, click [here](#).

**Fighting Childhood Obesity** – Senate Bill 12 passed the Senate this week by a vote of 50 – 1. The legislation limits the liability of Georgia’s public school systems for injuries and damages suffered in after-school play with the hopes of encouraging more after school activities to fight Georgia’s childhood obesity problem. Georgia has the second highest childhood obesity rate in the country. To read SB 12 click [here](#).

**Advance Practice Registered Nurses** – SB 94 passed out of the Senate Health Committee this week. The legislation eliminates the current restriction that prevents an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse from ordering diagnostic studies such as CT and MRI scans unless there is a “life threatening situation”. To read SB 94 click [here](#).

**Sequestration cuts** - Sallie Barker, GRHA Legislative Chair and Matt Caseman, GRHA Executive Director, recently visited congressional offices February 5th for the National Rural Health Association's annual Policy Institute. The event offered an opportunity to learn first-hand about the development and implementation of health care policy at the federal level and a chance to meet with Georgia's congressional delegation.

NRHA developed three "asks" or items that advocates took to Capitol Hill. GRHA asked Georgia's senators and representatives to support:

- 1) **Modifying the Medicare sequestration process set to begin in March 2013 to avoid disproportionate harm to the rural health safety net.**
- 2) **The continuation and strengthening of rural Medicare programs.**
- 3) **Appropriate funding levels for rural health programs for the remainder of fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2014.**

Documentation and background information for the advocacy effort can be reviewed through NRHA's Policy Institute [Action Kit](#).

## **In the News.....**

### **Looming Sequestration Cuts put Rural Providers on Edge**

February 20, 2013

"Our whole message to Capitol Hill is that a 2% across-the-board cut might sound like a way of providing equitable pain, but it is actually disproportionately harmful to the rural safety net. We are trying to let people know that there are serious ramifications to sequestration in rural America and a 2% cut to a small rural hospital can mean services being cut to patients and it could mean job losses. When you are operating at that small margin, and 40% of rural facilities already operate at a loss, this 2% cut on top of this other uncertainty is incredibly challenging."

Estimates provided to NRHA by iVantage Health Analytics show that urban hospitals would eat about \$2.4 billion of the \$2.9 billion in Medicare cuts this year, while rural hospitals would take a \$482.6 million hit.

[Read more](#)

### **Advocates urge Georgia governor to reconsider Medicaid expansion**

By Misty Williams

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

A coalition of consumer advocates, health care providers, nonprofits and other groups urged Gov. Nathan Deal on Tuesday to reconsider extending health care coverage to 650,000 poor Georgians by expanding the state's Medicaid program.

Deal has remained steadfast in his refusal to broaden Medicaid, saying the state can't afford to expand the ailing government health program as it currently operates. Medicaid already faces a nearly \$400 million budget hole.

But supporters say Georgia can't afford to forgo the large infusion of federal funds that will go to states moving forward with expansion. In Georgia, that could amount to \$40 billion over the next decade.

[Read more](#)

## **Deal unswayed by Florida's switch on Medicaid**

By Greg Bluestein

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Florida's Rick Scott this week became the seventh Republican governor to embrace a key element of the federal health overhaul by enrolling more poor people in Medicaid. Don't expect Gov. Nathan Deal to make it eight any time soon.

Deal, also a Republican, has remained outspoken in his refusal to expand Medicaid coverage to at least 650,000 more Georgians, citing the budget woes already facing the government health program. He said the state's share of the cost of expanding Medicaid - a projected \$4.5 billion over a decade - would be too great.

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