



Welcome to this month's edition of the AMA's *Very Influential Physician (VIP) Insider*. Read on for details about these topics:

- Opioid crisis takes personal toll on Washington, D.C.
- Social Media - advocates should tell members they ARE constituents
- Prior authorization - one of the AMA's top priorities
- Charlie Cook: How to Handicap the Race for the Senate

### **Opioid crisis takes personal toll on Washington, D.C.**

By Rachel Roubain of [The Hill](#)

The opioid crisis is hitting families across the nation regardless of income, race or gender. Lawmakers are no exception. In the past few months, The Hill has talked to a number of House and Senate members who have a personal connection to addiction and the opioid epidemic. This is the first in a five-part series presented by Partnership for Safe Medicine.

Federal and state governments are struggling to respond to the surge in opioid abuse, a devastating phenomenon that is taking an immeasurable toll on the country.

Tens of thousands of families, including those of officials working at the highest levels of government, have seen loved ones struggle with the disease of addiction.

The epidemic has put enormous strain on health care responders, treatment providers and communities across the country, creating a health emergency that shows no signs of abating.

Yet despite the gravity of the problem, there's a sense from some that the nation isn't doing enough to stem the crisis.

[Read the full article](#)

### **Social Media - advocates should tell members they ARE constituents**

Have you ever wondered if it is important for you to indicate that you are a constituent when you engage your members of Congress using social media? Our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) asked congressional staff the following question:

"If your Member of Congress has not arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following social media posts directed to your office (including posts on your office/Member platforms) have on their decision?"

We learned: It is important for citizen advocates to indicate that they are constituents when they use social media to communicate with their Members of Congress. Most of the respondents (60%) indicated that posts from "a single constituent" would have some or a lot of influence. However, when it was unclear whether the sender was a constituent, that number dropped to only 17%.

Unlike postal letters or emails, wherein Members of Congress require street addresses for the purposes of confirming that senders are legitimate constituents, it is difficult for Members of Congress to distinguish their constituents' social media posts and comments from those posted by non-constituents. Advocates who make the effort to identify that they are constituents on social media are nearly four times more influential than those who don't.

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### **Prior authorization among the AMA's top priorities**

In a [new video series](#) AMA President David Barbe, MD, highlights the AMA's top priorities in 2018, including reforming the prior authorization process. According to a recent [AMA survey](#) (PDF) more than nine in 10 physicians say that prior authorization programs have a negative impact on patient clinical outcomes. The survey results further bolster a growing recognition across the entire health sector that prior authorization programs must be reformed.

Recently the AMA has launched a new prior authorization [interactive experience](#) for physician advocates as part of the Physicians Grassroots Network. Here you can learn more information about the issue, see what the AMA is doing to fix it and have the ability to share your story on how PA is affecting your ability to practice.

You can also learn about the steps the AMA is taking to combat the overused and time-consuming process of prior authorization by watching a [short video](#). "Fixing Prior Authorization" is also the focus of the [Advocating for Patients and Physicians](#) topic page.

### **How to Handicap the Race for the Senate**

*By Charlie Cook of the National Journal*

The toughest question for me this election cycle is which party, if either, will gain Senate seats.

With the obvious caveat that things can change between now and Nov. 6, it's reasonably clear that Republicans in the House are going to have a tough election. The question is whether it will be bad, really bad, or really, really bad. Even though

President Trump's current approval ratings aren't as weak as they were in the fall, they are still at a historically low level for a president at this stage and definitely in the danger zone. And remember, the president's approval ratings and the performance of his party in House races are historically often linked.

But the Senate outlook is far more complicated. On the one hand, there are those low poll numbers for Trump (39 percent approve, 56 percent disapprove in the March 26-April 1 Gallup Poll) and a heightened intensity among Democratic voters that are flashing “danger, danger, danger” for the GOP. And yet the politics of the states where senators are up for reelection make this Senate map the most lopsided in modern history, favoring Republicans. I keep talking about the Democratic tidal wave crashing up against the Republican seawall; in the Senate, it is a fair fight between the two.

This peculiar situation almost invites the conclusion that we could have offsetting penalties on this play and little if any net change in the Senate. But things are rarely this simple in politics. As my colleague, Cook Political Report Senior Editor and Senate election expert Jennifer Duffy, points out, the close races in the Senate tend to break disproportionately in one direction rather than splitting evenly. According to Duffy, over the last 10 elections, among the Senate contests rated in the “Toss Up” column by The Cook Political Report going into Election Day, 80 percent have broken the same direction.

This tendency for explosive finishes in the closest Senate races, with the last gust of wind disproportionately pushing so many of the tight ones in the same direction, along with a smaller number of seats up than in the House, creates a volatility in Senate outcomes that makes them harder to predict.

It should be noted that once Gov. Rick Scott (R) officially jumps into the Senate race against Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson, the mega-state of Florida will get moved into the Toss Up column. But there are seven states currently rated by The Cook Political Report as Toss Ups, and three out of the seven are in smaller-population states—Nevada (Dean Heller), North Dakota (Heidi Heitkamp), and West Virginia (Joe Manchin)—while the other four are in medium-size states—Arizona (Jeff Flake's open seat), Indiana (Joe Donnelly), Missouri (Claire McCaskill), and Tennessee (Bob Corker's open seat).

So it could be a pretty small number of votes spread across a relatively low number of states that will determine the fate of the Senate. As we all learned in the 2016 presidential election, sometimes small vote totals can have big consequences.

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