



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

- Will Senate GOP feel the heat in 2020?
- How to build momentum when Congress is slow to act
- August recess is almost upon us – are you ready?
- Members Move Medicine profile with VIP Insider Marilyn Heine, MD

Will Senate GOP Feel the Heat in 2020?

By [Charlie Cook](#) of the National Journal

Republicans will be defending far more seats in two years, but relatively few of them will be in swing states.

Given that control of the House is teetering and the battle over the 51-49 Senate is just short of hand-to-hand-combat, it may seem odd to be thinking about the 2020 Senate elections. But there is good reason to look ahead.

The odds are pretty overwhelming that coming out of November, neither party is likely to have more than 53 seats. If the Democratic wave is both real and huge, they could theoretically hold onto all 26 of their own seats and pick up all three competitive Republican-held seats, beating Sen. Dean Heller in Nevada and capturing the open seats in Arizona and Tennessee. Even that unlikely scenario would only get Democrats to 52 seats; they would have to win all of those plus pull off an extremely long-shot upset, such as beating Sen. Ted Cruz in Texas or appointed Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith in Mississippi, to get to 53.

Conversely, given midterm-election patterns and President Trump's extremely weak job-approval numbers, Republicans picking up two seats to reach 53 would be quite an accomplishment, and a three-seat win would justify a parade down Constitution Avenue. Ironically, given that this class of Senate seats is the most lopsided in modern history, if there were a Democrat in the White House today we'd probably be speculating on Republican chances of getting to a 60-seat supermajority in November.

The asymmetric partisan Senate exposure this year is a product of Democrats having a terrific 2006, when President George W. Bush's job-approval rating had been hammered down to 38 percent in the Gallup Poll by the controversial war in Iraq, costing Republicans six Senate seats. When this class of Senate seats was last up, in 2012, the GOP lost two more, leading to this election with 26 Democratic seats up versus only nine for Republicans. To put it another way: This year, 53 percent of all Democratic Senate seats

are on the ballot, compared to just 18 percent of those held by Republicans.

The disproportionate Democratic Senate exposure in 2018 is almost the mirror opposite of what awaits in both 2020 and 2022 (though of course whichever party wins the presidential race in 2020 will have to deal with the midterm-election curse in 2022). In 2020, there are 21 Republican Senate seats up to just 11 for Democrats, not counting the Mississippi and Minnesota seats held by Hyde-Smith and Democratic Sen. Tina Smith, respectively (both seats, created by vacancies, are up this year and again in 2020). The numbers in 2022 are very similar: Twenty-two Republican seats are up to just 11 for Democrats.

As usual, open seats could be an important driver in 2020. While the incumbent-reelection rate for senators is not as high as it is in the House, having a lot of open seats is often a source of heartburn for party strategists. Putting aside the aforementioned Mississippi and Minnesota seats, of the 11 Democratic seats up in 2020, five are held by incumbents who will be at least 70 years old at the time of the election and thus worth watching for retirement signs: Sens. Dick Durbin of Illinois, who will be 75; Ed Markey of Massachusetts, 74; Jack Reed of Rhode Island, 70; Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, 73; and Tom Udall of New Mexico, 72.

Of the 21 Republican seats up in 2020, seven are held by senators who will be 70 or older at the time of that election: Sen. David Perdue of Georgia will be 70; Sen. Michael Enzi of Wyoming, 76; Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, 78; and Sen. James Risch of Idaho, 77. Three will be octogenarians: Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee will be 80, while Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas will be 84 and Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma will be 85.

Interestingly, the only seat up in 2020 in a state that the other party won massively is Sen. Doug Jones's in Alabama, where Trump won by 28 points in 2016. Other Democrats up in competitive but not nearly as difficult states are Sens. Gary Peters in Michigan and Shaheen in New Hampshire.

The GOP has just three of their 21 seats that are up in states that Trump either lost or won by 5 points or less: Sens. Susan Collins in Maine, where Clinton won by 3 points; Cory Gardner in Colorado, which Clinton carried by 5 points; and Thom Tillis in North Carolina, where Trump prevailed by 4 points. These presidential numbers are worth paying attention to as more people are voting along party lines. The Pew Research Center recently computed that as recently as the mid-1980s, more than half of senators represented states that went for the opposite party's presidential candidate. That number has since plummeted, and in 2016 every Senate seat went the same way the presidential race did in the state. The key question now is whether that will happen again in 2020.

How to Build Momentum When Congress is Slow to Act

Recently our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) took a look at a key problem facing many in the advocacy world – when Congress is slow to advance legislation or when issues are technical, how do you build momentum?

- How do you keep your grassroots supporters motivated to urge Congress to do the same thing year after year?
- How do you manage advocacy messaging when the issues are highly technical or sensitive?
- How do you demonstrate impact when Congress won't advance your legislative priorities?

Ask Yourself "Why" (Repeat)

Washington is a wonky town and wonks love to get lost in the weeds surrounding their issues. While it's important to understand potential implications of small details, professional advocates don't want to lose their citizen-advocates in the weeds. When a detail is important, ask yourself WHY it's important, then ask why the answer is important, then repeat that process until the reason is simple. For example, the American Heart Association asked itself why funding for research about heart disease is important. After several cycles of asking itself, "why?", the answer became clear and simple. "Life is why."

It's Your Job to Make People Care

Convincing people to take action is key to any advocacy leader's success. While data can be convincing, research shows that stories have the power to evoke an emotional response for listeners, and compel them to take action. Advocacy leaders who use relevant personal stories to illustrate how policies can have real-world impact are better equipped to keep their networks motivated. Advocacy leaders are advised to collect stories (story banks) that can communicate to your audience how proposals can affect real people just like them.

Make Data Work for You

In this data-driven world we live in, advocacy leaders need to demonstrate that they are building momentum even if their issues aren't being advanced in Congress. Unfortunately, data that shows digital reach (open rates, click-through rates, number of form letters sent) rarely illustrates actual impact. Yet impact measures are difficult to collect, so advocacy leaders better collect the data that is most valuable and invest resources toward achieving goals. Examples might include the following:

- Number of supporters represented by key lawmakers
- Number of supporters who have participated in advocacy training
- Number of effective advocacy stories

Final Thought

Many advocacy leaders spend years working to push Congress to pass legislative priorities. Much of that success is out of their control. While building and maintaining a motivated and effective grassroots/grasstops network can be a challenge, focus on what you can do to compel people to care about your cause, and effectively illustrate why.

August recess is coming – are you ready?

There are few certainties in life; death, taxes and until recently, Congress' annual August recess. We say "until recently" because Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced that the Senate would be cutting its August recess short by three weeks.

However, have no fear - the House will be following its own schedule.

The August recess provides an excellent opportunity for you to advocate on the issues important to medicine. Please [visit our advocacy site](#) for more information on the hot-button issues facing the profession today. Many members spend the month of August back in their districts holding town hall events, meeting with constituents and most importantly listening to the concerns of the people they represent. If you haven't done so already, now is the time to schedule a district meeting or attend a town hall with your elected officials. Simply visit our [congressional directory](#) to find the district office contact information for your legislators.

And don't forget to take photos of your interaction! Please email the photo, names of participants and a brief description to political.affairs@ama-assn.org, and we'll post them in a future issue of the VIP Insider and share them through our Physicians Grassroots Network social media followers on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).



RIMPAC Treasurer and former RIMS President Peter Karzcmar, MD with Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) during a check presentation in Rhode Island.

Members Move Medicine profile with VIP Insider Marilyn Heine, MD

The AMA "Members Move Medicine" series profiles a wide variety of doctors, offering a glimpse into the passions of women and men navigating new courses in American

medicine.

On the move with: Marilyn J. Heine, MD, a physician in emergency medicine and hematology-oncology in active clinical practice in southeast Pennsylvania.

AMA member since: 1981.

What moving medicine means to me: Policymakers increasingly impact our practice of medicine. I am passionate that physicians have a vital role to advocate for our patients and our profession—not only at the bedside, but also in the “halls of our legislature”—to educate lawmakers on issues we face and help shape legislation that affects our patients and our profession.

To be effective advocates, each of us should focus on the 3 R's: build a relationship with our legislators, keep our issue on the legislator's radar, and make the issue real. Put a face on the issue with a patient vignette. Our professional lobbyists can help explain policy, but only we can tell the relevant story of the patient we “saw last Tuesday.”

How I move medicine: Over the last 25 years, I have focused on communication, grassroots advocacy, and involvement in organized medicine. Initiatives included calls to galvanize colleagues to act, letters to the editor and op-eds published in local and national papers, and social media. Plus I serve as chair of the physicians advisory board for our Congressman where I bring together colleagues of different specialties to present issues that impact our practices; and leader of physician coalitions for pro-physician state and federal candidates of both major political parties. AMA resources are valuable in these grassroots and political endeavors.

I met with President George W. Bush twice to discuss physician priorities and hosted practice site visits for members of Congress which enabled them to see our concerns from a new perspective, “with a white coat on,” and incentivized their action on key measures. One Congressman once said, with a smile, “We know about your tenacity. We guard our ankles when you call.”

En masse grassroots input prompted our Congressman to be instrumental in the passage of antitrust reform in the U.S. House. When I engaged colleagues to write to Congress to improve the Medicare program and “help us keep the lights on” to provide care for our patients and jobs for our employees, this generated hundreds of letters that I hand-delivered to legislators' offices. I coordinated a letter, authored by our Congressman and signed by our bipartisan delegation, which helped spur U.S. House leaders to promote important Medicare reform. Political engagement contributed to wins for “friends of medicine” in several close elections.

Career highlights: A particularly memorable event was when I invited a group of senior women to accompany a busload of physicians to our state capitol to lobby during a medical liability crisis. The women had seen physicians close or curtail practice due to the liability climate. When our state senator saw “the ladies in sneakers” enter his office as

advocates, he was astounded and even more motivated to successfully advance medical liability reform.

I am honored to serve in our AMA House of Delegates, where we develop policy, and on our Council on Legislation, where policy “is brought to life” through advocacy, positions on legislation, and model bills, as we advise our Board of Trustees.

Advice I'd give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: Always seek to do what is best for the patient. With that as your guidepost, you help ensure that your patient will have the best chance for an optimal outcome.

Aspect of my work that means the most: My most meaningful experiences are bonds with patients: opportunities to develop rapport, educate patients about their medical conditions, recognize their concerns, engage them in the treatment decision-making, and to be their champion in the course of medical care.



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