



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

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- AMPAC hosts first ever "virtual" Campaign School
- Final Call: Nominations for the AMPAC Award for Political Participation close January 31

Why physician advocacy at all levels will be key in 2021

Before issues such as [surprise medical billing](#) and [prior authorization](#) reform were taken up by Congress, physician advocates were engaged in these debates at the state level and this experience has proven to be beneficial when these concerns were elevated to a national forum.

"State legislative developments and regulatory experiences informed federal legislation and regulatory efforts as never before," said [Russ Kridel, MD](#), chair of the AMA Board of Trustees, who moderated a panel discussion with AMA leaders on the growing overlap between state and federal laws and regulations during the [2021 AMA State Advocacy Summit](#), held virtually this year because of the pandemic.

Surprise medical billing is an example of an issue that has been debated in the states, was addressed by Congress in 2020, and is expected to resurface in the states in 2021.

"Over the last several years, state legislatures have seen intense battles over surprise medical billing and during this time the AMA worked closely with many state medical associations and national medical specialty societies to develop sound policy solutions to address surprise medical billing and its drivers," said panelist [Marilyn J. Heine, MD](#), chair of the AMA Council on Legislation.

The AMA's existing policies and previous advocacy efforts on surprise billing were helpful during [the year-long debate](#) at the federal level.

"We emphasized that insurers fundamentally drive surprise billing through narrow networks, through take-it-or-leave-it contracts that stem from insurer-market dominance, and as patients face unexpected

cost sharing through benefit design such as high-deductible health plans," said Dr. Heine, a hematologist-oncologist and emergency physician in southeast Pennsylvania.

To effectively advocate for a solution to surprise billing, the AMA also actively promotes that patients should receive fair coverage when they purchase health insurance and opposes proposals that would undercut fair-contracting efforts or reduce incentives for plans to create adequate networks.

The AMA expects that state-level controversies over surprise billing will be fewer in 2021 in the wake of [the federal law](#), but legislative efforts to supplement the act with laws applicable to state-regulated plans and private health insurer practices that impact physician networks, patient out-of-pocket costs, access and comprehensive coverage will continue to be a focus in many states.

"The AMA will also be working with states to determine where state laws end and the federal law begins," Dr. Heine said. "The AMA has a wealth of advocacy resources and extensive experience when it comes to taking on unfair insurer practices and we are well-poised to help our Federation partners this year."

Many state responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were carried out as executive orders from governors rather than through the legislature. As a result, AMA advocacy efforts were also directed toward policymaking organizations such as the National Governors Association, National Association of Insurance Commissioners, and the National Council of Insurance Legislators.

AMA President [Susan R. Bailey, MD](#), was also on the panel and she predicted that scope-of-practice debates would emerge in practically every state legislature in the country as nurse practitioners and physician assistants seek to practice with little or no physician supervision and pharmacists seek to administer vaccines and to prescribe medications for "minor conditions, so called" such as strep throat.

She noted that the AMA successfully defeated scope-expansion efforts in Mississippi and [Nebraska](#) in 2020.

Early in the pandemic, insurers relaxed many utilization-management requirements such as prior authorization and step therapy. Dr. Heine said the AMA advocates making these measures permanent by "highlighting to policymakers that, in such an emergency, even the payers recognize that prior authorization is a barrier to timely care."

Webinar: The Virtual Advocacy Toolkit & How to Conduct a [Virtual] Meeting with Congress

Join us Tuesday, February 2, from 3-4 p.m. EST as our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation share their insights and best practices on what it takes to conduct a virtual meeting with Congress. This webinar is VIP member exclusive.

[Register here](#)

Program description: Regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic and the January 6 attack on Capitol Hill, keeping in touch with constituents is among the most important job aspects for Members of Congress.

With most Members of Congress taking steps to observe social distancing protocols, congressional offices quickly adopted the use of virtual platforms to communicate with the people they represent. This presentation will highlight and provide tips for effectively using virtual advocacy strategies for engaging lawmakers including virtual meetings, emailing staff, social media, online and telephone town hall meetings, and more.

This program is based on exclusive and private surveys of congressional staff conducted by CMF and is available only to members of CMF's Partnership for a More Perfect Union.

The webinar is for citizen advocates as part of the Partnership for a More Perfect Union. It will be conducted by Bradford Fitch, President and CEO of CMF, and Seth Turner, Director of Citizen Engagement.

AMPAC hosts first ever “virtual” Campaign School

A tight race in a swing district was once again the backdrop for AMPAC’s annual Campaign School held virtually for the first time in its history. 24 participants from 15 states worked in teams on simulated virtual Congressional “campaigns” as they learned valuable lessons including sessions on how to communicate in a crisis and how to create effective campaign ads.

Recognized as one of the top programs in the country, the campaign school is AMPAC’s annual program for AMA member physicians, residents, students, spouses and state medical society staff who want to improve their political campaign skills. The core curriculum is centered on building skills in campaign strategy and message; and the 2020 workbooks allowed participants an advance opportunity to learn the basics of strategy, targeting and message. A series of online videos augmented the workbooks, and will hopefully provide the basis for transitioning portions of the curriculum to a virtual or web recording format.

The program opened with a virtual welcome reception the night before where participants were able to get to know one another as well as the training staff that they would be spending the next two weekends with. During the course of the program participants were broken into campaign “staff” teams for one of the two fictional candidates, and applied what they learned in real life exercises in strategy, vote targeting, social media, paid advertising and public speaking. Insider tactics were taught by experts from both sides of the political spectrum. These professionals are the experts currently advising campaigns at every level around the country.

Nominations for AMPAC Award for Political Participation Now Open

Awarded every two years by the AMPAC Board of Directors the AMPAC Award for Political Participation recognizes an AMA or AMA Alliance member who has made significant personal contributions of time and talent in assisting friends of medicine in their quest for elective office at the federal and state level. These can include: volunteer activities in a political campaign or a significant health care related election issue such as a ballot initiative or referendum.

Nominees must be a current member of the AMA or AMA Alliance and AMPAC with preference given to members with a demonstrated history of AMPAC involvement. The deadline to submit nominations is January 31. The full criteria for the 2019 AMPAC Award for Political Participation including how to submit a nomination can be found [here](#).

The winning nominee will receive special recognition during the AMPAC Board Chair's speech before the House of Delegates or during the AMPAC luncheon at the AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago. The winning nominee will also receive free admittance (including airfare and hotel expenses) to a future AMPAC political education program (campaign school or candidate workshop) in Washington, DC.
