



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

- Senate eyes phase four coronavirus relief package in coming weeks
- Hotline's updated Senate power rankings
- Should groups limit advocacy to COVID-19 only?

Senate eyes phase four coronavirus relief package in coming weeks

As the country continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, the House has taken the first step by passing version of "phase four" coronavirus relief legislation. Now it's the Senate's turn and they are expected to introduce their plan in the coming weeks.

As Senators consider how they will approach a coronavirus relief bill package to confront this emergency of extraordinary—and yet, unknown—proportions, the AMA strongly urges they take critical steps to protect patient access to care by preserving the viability of physician practices as part of the nation's essential health care system.

Specifically, it is important that the Senate's legislation include:

- Continue the expansion of and add flexibility for Medicare accelerated and advanced payments to give physicians greater ability to deal with the current crisis
- Better address Medicare and Medicaid payment policy to account for the lack of positive updates to further assist America's doctors caring for patients during the pandemic
- Include direct financial support to help sustain physician practices through the COVID-19 crisis including access to small business loans recently authorized by the Small Business Administration
- Continue support for the expansion of telehealth by requiring ERISA group health plans to provide the same telehealth services being covered by Medicare
- Increase support for resident physicians and students through federal loan forgiveness and tuition relief, including third and fourth year medical students
- Institute broader liability protection for physicians and clinicians as they continue their front-line fight against COVID-19

Read the AMA's joint [letter](#) with state medical and specialty societies sent to Congressional leadership.

The House got the ball rolling for this latest round of crucial COVID-19 stimulus, but now the Senate must step up to finish the job. Much has been done in the battle to curb the pandemic, but the catastrophic damage has taken an undeniable toll. Stimulus relief to date has helped, but is far from sufficient and every day that goes by without Congress passing a complete package and sending it to the President's desk is a stark reminder of how much more must be done to protect America's patients and those that are on the front lines taking care of them.

[Please contact your Senators today](#) and tell them that their phase four coronavirus relief legislation must include physician and patient protections outlined above.

Hotline's updated Senate power rankings

By [National Journal](#) reporters Madelaine Pisani, Leah Askarinam and Josh Kraushaar

Since January, Republican Senate candidates have been dealt a rough hand.

As President Trump leads the national response to the coronavirus pandemic—a public-health crisis that also tanked the U.S. economy—he has not seen the same bump in favorability that governors have received for their leadership.

GOP candidates whose political brands are tied to the president may feel his coattails shortening as Joe Biden gains ground in key states. Meanwhile, Montana Gov. Steve Bullock launched his Senate campaign in March, expanding the map for Democrats and forcing Republicans to play defense on another field. In Georgia, [two internal](#) GOP polls show competitive Senate and presidential races on the horizon. And GOP infighting in Kansas could add another competitive race to the map.

Our top six most competitive races stay the same, though because of the national environment, the GOP incumbents appear more at-risk than they did in January. But given the unpredictable political environment, there is time for Republicans to make up ground. Montana makes its first appearance this cycle and, given Trump's difficulties in Michigan, that race has moved from seventh place to ninth. Republicans hold a 53-47 majority in the upper chamber. If Biden wins the presidency, Democrats need to net three seats to flip the chamber.

Here is Hotline's ranking of the seats most likely to flip, with the race's placement in our January ranking in parentheses.

1. Alabama—Sen. Doug Jones (D) (previous ranking: 1)

Gov. Kay Ivey's decision to move the runoff from March 31 to July 14 was a lucky break for the incumbent—and former Attorney General Jeff Sessions. The delay allowed Jones more time to quietly fundraise while Sessions a former Auburn University football coach Tommy Tuberville duke it out for the nomination, while Sessions benefitted from extra time to retool his campaign. Just this week, Sessions sent an open letter to “set the record straight” on record in the Trump administration, responding to the president's continuing lambasting of his former appointee, without ever criticizing the president. Even with an \$8 million war chest and GOP infighting, Jones remains the underdog, given that his 2017 margin against Roy Moore—a uniquely flawed candidate—was under 2 percentage points. This year, with Trump on the ballot, he would need the stars to align to win.

2. Colorado—Sen. Cory Gardner (R) (2)

Former Gov. John Hickenlooper has opened up double-digit leads against Gardner in the latest polls as the president's approval ratings drag down Republicans. Hickenlooper still faces a primary challenge from former state House Speaker Andrew Romanoff, who won a spot on the ballot at the state assembly, and his progressive supporters, but social distancing could stymie any momentum he generated before the pandemic broke out. Meanwhile, Gardner is positioning himself as an ally to Democratic Gov. Jared Polis in securing personal protective equipment for the state and has even called for an investigation of the Trump administration's handling of ventilator distribution from the national stockpile (though that's as far as he'll go in distancing himself from the president). Republicans are optimistic that an ethics investigation into Hickenlooper's use of private planes will drive down his popularity. Gardner would likely have to outperform Trump by a significant margin to hold his seat, considering Trump lost the state by 5 points in 2016.

3. Arizona—Sen. Martha McSally (R) (3)

McSally is one of the Republicans' top fundraisers but has still consistently trailed Democrat Mark Kelly. In 2019, reportedly told Republicans in the state that she's hoping for a boost from outside spending, but as Democrats expand their competitive terrain, resources may be spread thin. Both candidates—a former Air Force pilot and

retired astronaut, respectively—have strong resumes to tout, though McSally's close alignment with Trump sometimes overshadows her individual political brand. Trump will target the state again after carrying it by 4 points in 2016, which may put McSally in a better position than when she was at the top of the ticket in 2018. Both candidates' poll numbers align closely with the presidential race, and Biden and Kelly have led the latest surveys

4. North Carolina—Sen. Thom Tillis (R) (4)

At the start of the coronavirus crisis, it seemed that Tillis's struggle to tie himself to Trump had finally ended. His primary challenger had dropped out, and his work with the president on the pandemic seemed to have overshadowed their skirmish on an emergency declaration for funding of a wall at the southern border. But that relationship seems less likely to save him now than it did a year ago. Democrats had a string of good polling in the gubernatorial and presidential races; if that trend continues through November, there's only so much Tillis could do to win reelection in the race against his Democratic opponent, former state Sen. Cal Cunningham.

5. Maine—Sen. Susan Collins (R) (5)

The big question for Collins is whether her handling of the spread of the coronavirus solidifies her standing, which might be poorer than in her previous races but remains on par with other vulnerable GOP senators. Republicans believe that Collins's spotlight has the added benefit of minimizing Democratic state House Speaker Sara Gideon's profile in the state, as all the attention lands on Democratic Gov. Janet Mills and members of Congress. But in another sense, Collins's job is becoming increasingly difficult as Trump's numbers fall, forcing her to earn more support from Biden voters. In theory, national trends should make her more vulnerable now than she was a few months ago; however, she should get the benefit of the doubt, given her past overperformance of fellow Republicans.

6. Iowa—Sen. Joni Ernst (R) (6)

The Des Moines Register's endorsement of retired Adm. Michael Franken threw a wrench into the conventional wisdom of the race thus far—that Theresa Greenfield was virtually guaranteed to win the Democratic nomination and take on Ernst. But Democratic polling firm Public Policy Polling followed the endorsement with a survey showing Greenfield with 43 percent in the primary, followed by Franken at 12 percent. Either way, Republicans are excited that Democrats have yet to consolidate around a candidate, hoping the eventual nominee enters the general election bruised. Democrats, on the other hand, believe that Ernst is particularly susceptible to attack ads without a firm base of support. In the end, Trump's performance might matter in Iowa more than either Senate candidate's, and the economic downturn's impact on ethanol, meat, and other Iowa-based products won't help him.

7. Montana—Sen. Steve Daines (R) (unranked)

Steve Bullock, Montana's popular sitting governor, was the Democrats' only hope in mounting a legitimate threat to Daines. He announced his campaign in early March, immediately expanding the map for Democrats, just before coronavirus created a public-health and economic crisis that coincided with governors' surging approval numbers across the country. Still, Bullock must convince one in five GOP voters to back him over Daines in a state that Trump is nearly certain to win. Montana has a history of ticket-splitting and Bullock managed to win with Trump on the ballot in 2016. However, he was the incumbent in a race for state-level office and faced a polarizing opponent, Greg Gianforte. There has been scant polling in the race so far. Bullock and Daines both posted strong fundraising numbers in the first quarter of 2020, though money won't be the deciding factor in a state where ad space is cheap.

8. Georgia—Sen. Kelly Loeffler (R) (8)

Gov. Brian Kemp's decision to appoint Loeffler to Sen. Johnny Isakson's seat over Rep. Doug Collins drew the businesswoman's enemies among conservatives who preferred the Trump-aligned congressman. Then the stock market crashed and Loeffler's personal finances brought up uncomfortable questions. Though she has virtually unlimited resources and the backing of the National Republican Senatorial Committee and Senate Leadership Fund, frequent attacks from Collins and unflattering headlines put her in dangerous territory. Any race in Georgia needs the winner to hit 50 percent plus one vote, otherwise it goes to a runoff. Leaked internal polling linked to Collins and his allies showed her trailing not only Collins, but Democrat Matt Liebman as well. She tied with Rev. Raphael

Warnock, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee's chosen candidate. However, if Collins took the race a runoff, the GOP is still in a strong position to hold the seat. The path to victory for Democrats would require the party's first choice, Warnock, to consolidate enough support to win the race outright in November. There is also a chance the January runoff is the seat that decides the Senate majority, which would draw immense attention and likely be a jump ball between the parties.

8. (tie) Georgia—Sen. David Perdue (R) (unranked)

Don't sleep on the other Senate race in the Peach State. Perdue is feeling the heat as well, considering two inter polls from Georgia Republicans showed Democrat Jon Ossoff within striking distance of the first-term senator. Perdue is very much aware he's in for a competitive race: In a closed-door meeting, Perdue told supporters the s is "in play." One intriguing scenario: Libertarian Party candidate Shane Hazel could keep Perdue from winning a majority. Yes, there could be a second high-stakes Georgia runoff taking place in January deciding which party controls the Senate.

9. Michigan—Sen. Gary Peters (D) (7)

In less-favorable circumstances, Peters would be looking at a more challenging race, as it's the GOP's only other attainable pick-up opportunity besides Alabama. Trump will be spending in Michigan, a battleground that was key his 2016 victory, and John James, an Army veteran who faced Sen. Debbie Stabenow in 2018, has the resume a fundraising chops to become a rising star in the party. However, James may fall victim to Trump at the top of the ticket, as the president's support lags. James's path to outperforming him would require appealing to Trump's base while also drawing in disaffected Republicans and moderates by distancing himself from the president—a conundrum he has not yet solved. In head-to-head polling there could be a window for James since Peters has y to hit 50 percent, but the polling also shows James struggling to reach 40 percent.

10. Kansas—Open seat (R) (10)

Like Gov. Laura Kelly's victory in 2018, a win for state Sen. Barbara Bollier against any one of her likely Republic opponents would be a shock in November—but would be the least shocking if she prevailed over Kris Kobach. Armed with an endorsement from Trump, who won the state by over 20 points in 2016, Kobach lost the governorship for Republicans in 2018. Rep. Roger Marshall appears to be the leading choice of the state Republican Party, though businessman Bob Hamilton's entrance in March shook up the primary field. Bollier led l slate of GOP challengers in fundraising, though she and Kobach both relied on out-of-state cash. In a year when Republicans are overloaded on defense, a competitive race in Kansas would add to their already-growing headache.

Should groups limit advocacy to COVID-19 only?

Many groups that our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) work with have asked whet they should limit their advocacy to issues that are ONLY related to COVID-19 or whether it's okay to engage on other issues. To get answers, CMF polled more than 100 congressional staff on their transition to remote work, it: effect on their operations, and how groups with constituents in their district should communicate. CMF asked whether they agreed with the following statement.

"Groups with constituents in our district/state should be communicating with our office on the following topics." (Issues that are limited to COVID-19, Issues indirectly related to COVID-19, and Issues that have no connection COVID-19)

We learned: *Whether to engage* depends on the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted the Member's state/district, but the *engagement strategy matters* a great deal too. Of those participating in the survey, 96% agr that constituents in their district should engage with them on issues directly or indirectly related to COVID-19, wh 79% agreed that constituents should also reach out about issues not related to COVID-19 whatsoever.

CMF got more clarity on this question during an [exclusive Webinar for CMF partners](#), which CMF interviewed Rep. Donna Shalala's District Director/Deputy Chief of Staff. He shared that the district office is experiencing a surge in their workload from constituents with calls from constituents requesting assistance with immediate needs such as processing Small Business Administration loan and Unemployment Insurance applications. Considering the information CMF collected from congressional staff, CMF has three recommendations for advocacy groups.

- **Defer to Staff:** Constituents with existing relationships with congressional staff could reach out to inquire whether it's helpful to engage now or at a later time, and engage accordingly.
 - **No Calls Unless It's an Emergency:** Limit advocacy campaigns on issues not related to COVID-19 to social media and email.
 - **We (That Includes Congress) Are All in This Together:** Remember that Members of Congress and their staff are people too – they are also personally experiencing many of the same grief, loss and challenges caused by the COVID-19 crisis that we are.
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