



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

- Congress passes new opioid package
- After Kavanaugh – a tale of two increasingly divergent elections is emerging
- Who has more influence – constituent groups or Congressional leadership?
- 2018 midterm elections are less than a month away – are you ready?

Congress passes new opioid package

Congress has reached agreement on legislation to address the opioid epidemic. The House passed H.R. 6, the "[SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act](#)," by a vote of 393 to 8, and the Senate followed suit, passing H.R. 6 by a vote of 98 to 1. President Donald Trump is expected to sign the bill into law. The legislation touches on almost every aspect of the epidemic. It includes numerous provisions supported by the AMA that will expand access to substance-use disorder (SUD) prevention and treatment programs. Some of the significant AMA-supported provisions would:

- Expand existing programs and create new programs to prevent SUDs and overdoses, including reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.
- Expand programs to treat SUDs, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT); partially lift (for five years) a current restriction that blocks states from spending federal Medicaid dollars on residential addiction treatment centers with more than 16 beds by allowing payments for residential substance-use disorder services for up to 30 days; and allow Medicare to cover MAT, including methadone, in certain settings, to treat SUDs.
- Increase funding for residential treatment programs for pregnant and postpartum women; and require the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop educational materials for clinicians to use with pregnant women for shared decision making regarding pain management during pregnancy.
- Authorize an [alternative payment model](#) demonstration project developed by the American Society of Addiction Medicine, with support from the AMA, to increase access to comprehensive, evidence-based outpatient treatment for Medicare beneficiaries with opioid-use disorders.
- Authorize CDC grants for states and localities to improve their Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMP), collect public health data, implement other evidence-based prevention strategies, encourage data sharing between states,

and support other prevention and research activities related to controlled substances, including education and awareness efforts.

- Expand the use of telehealth services for Medicaid and Medicare SUD treatment.
- Provide loan repayment for SUD-treatment professionals, including physicians, who agree to work in mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) or counties that have been hardest hit by drug overdoses, and clarify that mental and behavioral health providers participating in the National Health Service Corps can provide care at a school or other community-based setting located in a HPSA as part of their obligated service requirements.
- Help stop the flow of illicit opioids into the country by mail, especially synthetic fentanyl and its analogs.
- Provide funding to encourage research and development of new non-addictive painkillers and non-opioid drugs and treatments.
- Require the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to study and report to Congress on the impact of federal and state laws and regulations that limit the length, quantity, or dosage of opioid prescriptions.

[Read more](#)

A Tale of Two Increasingly Divergent Elections

By [Charlie Cook](#) @CHARLIECOOKDC

It turns out that the bitter fight over Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination was what I call a color-enhancement event—it made the reds redder and the blues bluer.

The old cliché about partisans coming home before an election is true, but the reality for Democrats was that this time, they never actually left home. Democrats have been manning—or in many cases "womaning"—the ramparts ever since Election Day 2016. While the natural "coming home" phenomenon for Republicans would be happening anyway, the fight over Kavanaugh's nomination expedited and perhaps turbocharged that dynamic, possibly nixing the chances for any Senate Democrats who were counting on many Republican or GOP-leaning independents votes to win.

From January through August, in their national surveys for NBC News and The Wall Street Journal, Republican pollster Bill McInturff and Democratic pollster Fred Yang found that when they asked voters to rate their interest in the upcoming midterm elections, on a scale of 1 to 10, 63 percent of Democrats put themselves as 9s or 10s, extremely interested, while 51 percent of Republicans said the same. But going into the height of the Kavanaugh fight, their Sept. 16-19 poll found that Democrats went up just 2 more points to 65 percent, while Republicans rose 10 points to 61 percent. And that was before the nomination fight hit its crescendo.

For Senate Democrats in red states seeking to swim up the partisan stream, the fallout from the Kavanaugh nomination opened up the floodgates, making their challenge exponentially more difficult. In congressional districts with substantial suburban populations, particularly college-educated ones, the fallout for Republicans among

many women offset this heightened partisanship. But in states with fewer such suburbs, things just got redder. That's why over the last couple of weeks, the Senate has become even more difficult for Democrats than before even as the House looks as bad as ever for Republicans, their hopes for holding onto a majority all but gone.

While much has appropriately been said and written about intensity and enthusiasm among partisans, and how key that is for turnout, what has largely gone unnoticed is the partisan differential even before intensity is considered. In the five national NBC/WSJ polls conducted since the beginning of June, amounting to over 4,000 interviews with registered voters, the share of voters initially identifying as Democrats was 32 percent, 6 points more than the 26 percent who called themselves Republicans, while 29 percent identified themselves as independents. Twenty-four percent of all registered voters considered themselves strong Democrats, 20 percent strong Republicans. Keep in mind that basically 90 percent of partisans habitually vote for their party. Eleven percent said they were independents who leaned Democrat, 10 percent leaned toward Republican, and 8 percent had no lean, were "pure independents." Remember that 80 percent of independents who lean Democrat, can be counted on voting Democrat, the same for independents who lean Republican, just as regularly vote Republican.

When you add it all up, those that identify with or lean toward Democrats make up 42 percent, while 36 percent identify or lean Republican, still a 6-point Democratic advantage (the numbers vary a bit due to rounding). We will see in about 10 days (that's when the next NBC/WSJ poll is expected to be released) whether an increase in GOP intensity has equaled the level of Democrats.

One additional theme we have been seeing is that spending in many states—particularly the most Republican ones—has really taken hold as an issue, especially when it comes to school funding and teacher pay. In Kansas and Oklahoma, Democrats have been mounting unusually strong challenges for governor, but it's unclear whether they can hold up post-Kavanaugh. It had appeared that tax cuts and their corresponding spending cuts in these states had gone too far, working against Republicans in state elections. Will that continue, or will the "coming home" of the party's voters negate that?

Back on the federal level, what is so interesting is the split between the direction of these Senate races and what we are seeing in the House—there is an unmistakable shift in public and private polling toward Republicans in the Senate but only modest movement toward the GOP in the House, where the bad news is simply unrelenting. This "tale of two elections" theme continues.

Constituent Groups Have More Influence than Congressional Leadership

Our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) wanted to quantify who has more influence on congressional decisions: constituent groups (association members, nonprofit supporters, or company employees) or congressional leaders. They asked legislative assistants and legislative directors the following question.

"When making a recommendation to your boss on a vote or co-sponsorship, how important are the following in your decision-making process?"

What they learned might surprise you: Organizations with active advocacy networks have almost four times more influence on congressional decisions than congressional leaders. While one in five (21%) congressional staff responded that the position of our congressional leadership is a "very important" factor in their decision-making process, four out of five (81%) said that the position of key group(s) with constituents in our district/state is very important. This research counters the Hollywood narrative that policy decisions are made by powerful congressional leaders in smoke-filled rooms. The truth is that organizations with active advocacy networks have a great deal more influence in the congressional decision-making process than congressional leadership.

Source: Partnership for a More Perfect Union, Copyright Congressional Management Foundation, <http://CongressFoundation.org>. Used with permission.

2018 midterm elections are less than a month away – are you registered to vote?

With the 2018 elections less than a month away and control of the House and Senate remains in the balance. With so many of these races will come down to a point or two, it's important to make sure you're prepared for the election. In recent years many states have expanded early voting, voting by mail and absentee voting—and it can be confusing. If you have questions about registration, polling locations or other state requirements, get the information you need at [vote 411.org](http://vote411.org).

AMA member advocates meet with their legislators to discuss the important issues facing medicine:



PAMED member and super advocate, Marilyn Heine, MD with Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)

Matt Robison, Oklahoma State Medical Association (OSMA) Director of Government Affairs; Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK); OSMA members Edgar Boyd, MD and Jay Gregory, MD



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