Dodd and Larson Tour Manchester Memorial Hospital and Discuss Pension and Healthcare Reform Issues

On Saturday, Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Congressman John Larson (D-1) visited Manchester Memorial Hospital, toured the intensive care unit (ICU), and met with hospital staff to discuss the significant impact that the downturn of the stock market has had on hospitals’ pension plans and the status of healthcare reform legislation.

Senator Dodd and Congressman Larson were able to help secure funding for the newly renovated and expanded ICU and praised the hospital for the excellent care and state of the art electronic medical records. “This is really an example of where the country ought to be. We’re seeing it in almost all of our facilities here in Connecticut,” said Senator Dodd. “They’re really making that effort to be ahead of the curve and serve the people here both in terms of cost and also quality. We want to duplicate that effort across the country if we can.”

Senator Dodd stressed the need for healthcare reform this year, including the need to provide coverage for the 87 million who are uninsured at any one point in any year, the need to provide assistance to those who cannot afford high deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses, and the need to address the escalating costs of healthcare. The Senator also believes that Congress will reach an agreement on critical healthcare reform this year.

Prior to the tour, Senator Dodd and Congressman Larson met with Peter Karl, President & CEO, Eastern Connecticut Health Network and other senior hospital representatives to discuss the critical need for pension reform to address the significant impact on hospitals and other pension plan providers of recent pension law changes coupled with the downturn in the stock market.

Department of Public Health Unveils Online License Renewal

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) has announced that licensure renewal for physicians, dentists, licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, and advanced practice registered nurses is now available online. The implementation of the eLicense system follows years of advocacy by CHA and Connecticut hospitals for such a license renewal process. “The new system will enable hospitals to verify staff renewals soon after they have been entered and will serve to create a critically needed database for healthcare workforce planning for the state,” said Liz Beaudin, CHA’s Director of Nursing and Workforce Planning.
Initiatives.

Connecticut's eLicense system will allow licensees to renew their licenses and verify their addresses, and provide for online license verifications. Members of the general public may use the system to look up the credentials of a licensee. [Click here](#) for the eLicense system.

Beginning in August, DPH will be forwarding licensees’ online user names and passwords as part of their renewal applications. DPH is currently working on adding all other licensed healthcare providers to the online renewal program.

Delegation and CHA Work to Address CMS Interpretation

In a [letter](#) sent last week to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, the Connecticut Congressional delegation asks her to address a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) wage index policy interpretation issue that has affected Connecticut hospitals by reducing their Medicare payments by $40 million. Last year, John Dempsey Hospital pursued a technical change in its wage index designation after federal officials assured the hospital that the facility’s wage data would be included with only one other hospital in the rural index for the state, which would increase Medicare reimbursement for Connecticut hospitals. Despite those assurances, CMS excluded the hospital’s wage data from the rural wage index when the agency's fiscal 2009 rule was published, resulting in a $40 million loss to Connecticut hospitals.

The delegation protested that the state’s hospitals “have already been inordinately hard hit by CMS payment policy over the last decade”, and that Connecticut hospitals' “unprecedented level of financial instability” has resulted in postponed expansions, curtailed investment, and layoffs.

“The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ action deprives hospitals in Connecticut access to funds they desperately need at a time when literally every penny counts,” said Stephen Frayne, CHA’s Senior Vice President of Health Policy.

Legislature and Administration Agree on Budget Deficit Number of $8.56 billion; Appropriations and Finance Committees and Governor Rell Scheduled to Release New Budget Proposals

After six months of periodic intense disagreement, Republican Governor M. Jodi Rell and the legislature have finally reached consensus on the state’s projected budget deficit for the next two years. On Friday, the Administration and legislative leaders agreed that the budget deficit for FY 2010 & FY 2011 is $8.558 billion. Both sides were required to reach an agreement under the newly enacted consensus revenue forecasting legislation, which became effective last week after the proposal was vetoed by the Governor and subsequently [overridden](#) by the legislature.

Both sides are now required to prepare new budget proposals based on the agreed upon budget deficit. The Appropriations and Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committees are scheduled to meet this week to prepare and vote on a new budget proposal. Governor Rell is also expected to release a new budget proposal this week.

Governor Rell Expected to Release August Executive Order This Week

As July comes to an end, Governor Rell is expected to release her second Executive Order to keep the state running and state programs operational as Connecticut begins its second month without a budget in place. The second Executive Order is expected to be austere as Governor Rell limits state spending to match the ever-decreasing amount of [state revenue](#).

Comptroller Wyman Says a State Budget is Needed By September 1st

On Friday, July 24, Comptroller Nancy Wyman reminded legislators and the Governor that if there is no budget in place by September 1, she will be required to close the state books for FY 2009 and use the Rainy Day Fund to cover the past fiscal year's approximately $1 billion deficit. Both the legislature and the Governor have proposed balancing the FY 2009 budget deficit by issuing bonds and borrowing, and they help close the deficit for FY 2010 & FY 2011 by tapping into the state’s Rainy Day Fund.