



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

- Key highlights from the 2021 AMA National Advocacy Conference
- Urge Congress to support Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act
- What we don't yet know about the 2022 midterms
- Virtual meetings are here to stay – whether you like it or not

---

### **Key highlights from the 2021 AMA National Advocacy Conference**

This year's AMA National Advocacy Conference was virtual, but its goal was more important than ever, as we mark the heartbreaking milestone of 500,000 COVID-19 deaths: to press at the federal level for improving health care. Read highlights from the conference and its featured speakers, including presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.

This year's AMA National Advocacy Conference was virtual, but its goal was more important than ever, as we mark the heartbreaking milestone of 500,000 COVID-19 deaths: to press at the federal level for improving health care.

### ***What history can tell us about today's challenges***

World-renowned presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin began the conference in conversation with AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD, where they discussed what history can tell us about how to face our society's current challenges. Kearns Goodwin noted not since the Great Depression has the U.S. seen this level of trauma that affects everyone's everyday lives. Recounting stories and lessons from that time, as well as the Civil War and World Wars I-II, Kearns Goodwin suggested strong leadership was key to weathering—and bettering—ourselves through these times of crisis. The common threads of good leadership, she stated, are humility, empathy, resilience, ambition and trust. That theme carried through the rest of the conference, as speakers and attendees considered the best strategies for moving health care forward.

### ***100 million shots in 100 days***

COVID-19 vaccines were next on the agenda, where Bechara Choucair, MD, Vaccinations

Coordinator, White House COVID Response Team, discussed President Biden's goal of administering 100 million shots in his first 100 days in office. Dr. Choucair discussed the Administration's plans to increase: vaccination supply; the number of vaccinators; and places for vaccination—while working with physician and other provider groups on vaccine rollout. Also top of mind for the Administration is equitable distribution of vaccines, which Dr. Choucair said would be advanced by the President's Jan. 21 [“Executive Order on Ensuring an Equitable Pandemic Response and Recovery.”](#)

### ***Top advocacy issues***

CBS News' Margaret Brennan moderated the next two panels—discussions with AMA leadership and senior AMA advocacy staff—about the issues they address daily when discussing the AMA's efforts and advocacy agenda with members of Congress, the Administration and the media. The panelists also provided guidance on addressing these issues with members of Congress, and encouraged advocates to use the AMA's [Action Kit](#) in their virtual Hill visits with lawmakers—covering Medicare sequestration relief, telehealth expansion, maternal health and medical marijuana research.

### ***Congressional perspectives***

A number of lawmakers joined the conference to provide their takes on the health care issues atop everyone's minds—particularly COVID-19 vaccines, equity and related issues. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), a former small business owner, discussed the challenges faced by small physician practices in rural and underserved areas. She said the Medicare Advance and Accelerated Payments and other programs have been helpful, but more work is needed to ensure practice sustainability—including extending the moratorium on the 2% Medicare sequestration cuts currently scheduled to go into effect April 1—a top AMA priority. Rep. Brad Schneider (D-IL) also expressed the need to prevent across the board Medicare sequester cuts and touted his AMA-supported legislation to address the issue.

The expansion of telehealth has been a game-changer, cited by most of the Congressional speakers during the conference—and should be here to stay even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Rep. Terri Sewell (D-7th AL) grew up in the rural part of her district in Alabama and has seen how people need access to care via telehealth. And it is not just the health care technology that is needed—she said, “I believe broadband is the telephone of this century. It's critical, necessary infrastructure and we must invest in it.” Sen. Shaheen, Rep. Larry Bucshon, MD (R-8th IN) and Rep. Lucy McBath (D-6th GA) echoed the call for telehealth expansion.

Vaccine hesitancy is another critical topic addressed at the conference by Ami Bera, MD (D-7th CA) and Rep. Sewell. Dr. Bera noted there are two trusted sources of health care information in many underserved communities—particularly in Black communities: their own physicians and their clergy. He emphasized the need to get tools, resources and—in the case

of physicians, vaccines—into their hands so they can talk with their communities and offer the information needed to assuage vaccine hesitation.

Rep. McBath discussed the importance of addressing maternal mortality for Black women in particular, and how we can improve public health infrastructure by appropriating more money to strengthen public health data systems, among other measures.

Learn more about the [AMA National Advocacy Conference](#), and save the date for next year's conference in Washington, D.C., Feb. 14-16, 2022.

---

### **Urge Congress to support the Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act**

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to grip the country, America's physicians remain entrenched on the frontlines, fighting this deadly virus. While new vaccines continue to come online, there is still deep concern that persistently high COVID-19 rates will continue to stress the entire health care system, especially physician practices.

#### [Support H.R. 315, the "Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act"](#)

Congress recognized early on during the pandemic the severe financial strain facing our health care system and provided a much-needed reprieve from the two percent Medicare payment sequester through the remainder of 2020. Realizing the severity of the situation Congress again extended the sequester moratorium until March 31, 2021.

Unfortunately, even with the encouraging development and deployment of an effective vaccine, the fact remains that physician practices will continue to face overwhelming financial challenges and pressures associated with higher overhead costs (e.g., personal protective equipment) and lost revenue due to fewer patient visits and delayed elective procedures. Thankfully, H.R. 315 the "Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act" has been recently introduced in Congress. This bipartisan legislation that would continue the current Medicare sequester moratorium for the duration of this public health emergency.

#### [Please contact your member of Congress and Senators today and urge them to support the "Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act" today!!](#)

If Congress doesn't act by March 31, the Medicare payment sequester will take effect, triggering a devastating financial impact on physician practices across the country, many of which are already strained to the breaking point. America's physicians need relief!

---

## What we don't yet know about the 2022 midterms

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

On Monday night, I received a text message from one of my best friends from childhood—a very smart lawyer as well as a very partisan Democrat—who was convinced that what appears to be a civil war taking place within the Republican Party would enable Democrats to pick up at least four Senate seats and presumably a bunch of House seats as well.

With little short of open warfare between former President Trump and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, the current political moment certainly must bring cheer to any staunch Democrat. My caution to him is that with nearly 630 days between now and the midterm election, a lot of water will go under this bridge before voters head to the polls. With so much uncertainty surrounding retirements, recruiting, the political environment, the economy, and of course the trajectory of the coronavirus, it's impossible to make even a remote guess as to what may happen.

Heck, I don't know which side is more likely to gain or lose seats in the Senate or House next year. History suggests that Republicans should pick up seats, and even minimal gains would likely put them on top in either or both chambers, given the Democrats' slim majorities. But then again, a party in turmoil—and in some cases eating its own—is not well positioned to win any elections.

My friend then conceded that he was being a bit too “Panglossian,” sending me to the dictionary (my guess that it meant overly optimistic was right but not too hard to figure out). I can't or wouldn't argue that my friend was wrong, only that it is too soon to argue either side of this particular equation.

It is now debatable whether the 2024 equivalent of any of the previous six Republican presidents (Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan and the two Bush presidents) could win a GOP nomination these days, not to mention the last three Republican nominees that didn't make it to the Oval Office (Bob Dole, John McCain, and Mitt Romney). It's possible that even Barry Goldwater would fail today's ideological litmus tests.

Those close to McConnell argue that the Republicans' losses in Georgia's two January Senate runoffs could foreshadow coming tribulations. Trump will not be on the ballot on Nov. 8 of next year, which would be the only motivator for his most ardent supporters to show up to the polls. Meanwhile, the former president's feud with McConnell's wing of the party could

also depress the Republican vote among non-Trumpian Republicans, while Trump's public activity drives up the Democratic vote.

One might recall that Barack Obama brought out turnout of unbelievable levels among elements of the Democratic base that normally don't vote in big numbers, powering his election in 2008 and reelection in 2012. But those low-propensity voters didn't show up in 2010, 2014, or even 2016, with disastrous consequences for Democrats. As one Democratic pollster said at the time, "They don't call them Obama voters for nothing."

The truth, however, is that a healthy slice of Trump voters did actually vote in the 2018 midterms. Since voters on both sides of the aisle came out of the woodwork, 2018 had the highest midterm turnout in 104 years. But while Trump's name was not literally on the ballot, it was, figuratively speaking, as he rallied voters and leveraged the bully pulpit. Trump was the best vehicle for both sides to turn out their voters.

So, having outlined what we don't know yet about next year's midterms, what do we know? Incumbency is of less value than ever before, and candidates' personal brands matter less than they used to. As longtime National Journal writer Ron Brownstein says, it's not the name on the back of the jersey that matters so much anymore, it's the color of the jersey. Ours is a parliamentary voting system now.

The last four or five months of next year will be key, especially evaluating Biden's performance, Democratic enthusiasm (which will help determine turnout), and the degree of lingering Republican disillusionment (which will determine their participation rate). While history puts a finger on the scale for Republicans in the Senate, exposure—that is, how many seats the GOP has to defend, particularly open seats—could remove their natural advantage. With no incumbents defending seats in competitive states like North Carolina (Richard Burr), Ohio (Rob Portman), and Pennsylvania (Pat Toomey), that is a challenge. In Iowa, Chuck Grassley has not announced whether he'll retire (my bet is he will run again). We'll also have to see if Democrats put up a credible challenge to incumbents in Wisconsin (Ron Johnson) and Florida (Marco Rubio).

The unknowns go on: Do Democrats have to defend any open seats in competitive states? Does New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu take on Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan? What kind of challenge do Catherine Cortez Masto (Nevada) and Michael Bennet (Colorado) receive? And do Republican primary voters nominate "electable" candidates, as McConnell hopes?

In the House, only seven Democrats represent districts Trump carried, while nine Republicans hold seats that Biden carried. With the House pretty sorted out along partisan lines, it won't take a tsunami or even a more conventional tidal wave to move a dozen or two seats. Even a ripple might do it.

In short, it's better to relax than either build up hope or despair. There are way too many things that could determine the outcome of the midterms that we cannot possibly know.

---

### **Virtual meetings are here to stay – whether you like it or not**

Our partners at the non-partisan Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) wanted to determine whether Congress would continue to meet constituents using virtual meeting platforms once the COVID-19 pandemic is safely contained. To find out, CMF asked senior House and Senate staff the following question:

*"Looking to the future and the long-term impact the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have on your office operations, please indicate whether you expect to increase, decrease, or keep the same amount of time and resources dedicated to the following."*

**What they learned:** Virtual meetings are here to stay. A clear majority of respondents (77%) indicated that they expect their offices to rely on videoconferencing platforms and phone calls more to engage with individual constituents. On the flip side, most senior managers expect to decrease time and resources spent on in-person meetings in Washington, D.C. (67%) and back home in the district/state (53%). This has significant implications – disruptive and productive alike – for traditional advocacy models that advocacy organizations and their supporters should keep in mind as they adapt to new norms.

---