

As Congress reconvenes, healthcare seen as "first among equals" of Democratic priorities.

The [Wall Street Journal](#) (4/20, Hitt) reports, "Shortly after Congress returns from recess Monday, lawmakers will have to choose which Obama promise to make a higher priority -- overhauling the healthcare system or addressing climate change." According to the Journal, "A growing number of Democratic lawmakers prefer healthcare, saying that has a far greater chance of producing consensus." Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) called healthcare "first among equals," and Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN) said it is "a way of delivering major good news to voters."

The [AP](#) (4/20, Alonso-Zaldivar, Werner) adds, "Senators get down to work this coming week on turning ideas into legislation to cover some 50 million people without health insurance and contain costs for everyone else. Hopes are high that Democrats and Republicans can find common ground for a bill to emerge by summer." But to do so, Congress will have to "defy history" and overcome healthcare reform's "half-century history of collapsing." But this time, reform "consensus" is "growing on many points: Changes should build on the current system...hospitals and doctors should be paid for quality, not quantity; insurers shouldn't be able to discriminate against people with health problems; small businesses need special attention." However, the "hardest issues" faced by reformers include costs, mandates and whether or not to "give middle-class workers and families the option of joining a government-sponsored insurance plan."

Health reformers should study organized systems of care, expert contends. In an op-ed in the [Houston Chronicle](#) (4/20), Spencer R. Berthelsen, chairman of the board of directors of Kelsey-Seybold Clinic, writes that national legislators reforming America's healthcare system should seriously consider organized systems of care. "An amount of \$1.1 billion has been set aside in the \$787 billion stimulus bill to evaluate methods of treatment used to treat common illnesses, with a goal of identifying effective treatment pathways based on the standards of evidence-based medicine. But this research effort will fall short unless it considers organized systems of care." Berthelsen argues that "it's not widely recognized, [but] these systems produce better clinical outcomes at a lower overall cost of care." He notes a CMS study which found that one such system saved Medicare money while improving health outcomes along with other studies illustrating his point. He concludes that "organized systems of care are providing millions of Americans with high quality care at a lower overall medical cost. They deserve to be emulated and reinforced."