House Call

Congress’ Attending Physicians Office plays the game

October 1, 1994 By David Thomas

A soft drizzle and a muddy playing field weren’t grounds to cancel the congressional baseball game August 6 -- the players, members of the House of Representatives, are used to slinging mud at each other. With Democrats at bat and Republicans in the field, the game was resembling the health care reform debate until first baseman Mike Oxley of Ohio’s Fourth District was mowed down fielding a grounder on the first play of the game.

Immediately at the side of the 13-year congressman was Dr. Robert Krasner, the attending physician of the Capitol, who ambulance-sat Oxley all the way to an Alexandria, Virginia, miliatay hospital where his shattered arm was reconstructed.

While Congress is debating the fate of 40 million Americans without health insurance -- 30 percent of people with AIDS among them -- about three-quarters of its own members have double protection. By tossing less than $600 a year into a special kitty, members of Congress can retain the services of the Attending Physicians Office, the Capitol’s own clinic, to supplement their federally sponsored $101-a-month insurance policy.

“The attending physicians office was established 67 years ago when there were several deaths on the House floor,” says Robert Burg, the office’s administrator. Members of Congress who ante up can use the office for check-ups and physicals, but the doors are open to anyone with an emergency, from bee stings to cardiac arrest. Not even protesters are denied care. "We had one gentleman in here who committed *hara kiri* right on the Capitol steps and a monk who set himself aflame in the parking lot. A group of protesting nuns got severe frostbite waiting in a bus," Burg says.

One might think that Oxley’s run-in with calamity would sway his vote toward radical reform, but the congressman, comfortably insured with two plans of his own, continues to support GOP House leader Bob Michel’s draconian bill, which, if one can imagine, would be even worse for people with HIV than Senate GOP leader Bob Dole’s bill. (A little loyalty from Mike Oxley may be due: Michel did, after all, sing the national anthem -- reportedly quite well -- before Oxley’s ill-fated game.) In fact, unlike Democrat Paul Tsongas’ cancer diagnosis that has turned the former Massachusetts senator into a major backer of sweeping health care reform, Republican health problems seem to have the opposite effect: Just days after Michel himself collapsed at a Denver golf tournament in

mid-August, he was back on the House floor trying to block the health care reform plan AIDS lobbyists most favor.

Talk about hardball.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/House-Call-16401-9380