Is the AMA still a relevant lobbying force on Capitol Hill? It’s a question posed in a story by Politico, and a concern many physicians have been having for years.

The piece traces the AMA’s powerful stance as a “must have” supporter of President Obama’s national health reform legislation to its “most prominent lobbying failure,” according to the authors, the association’s refusal to support a five-year moratorium on the proposed reimbursement cut to Medicare. In the end, Congress decided on a six-month delay, meaning the issue will again come up for debate in December.

Citing staffers on both sides of the aisle, Politico’s sources said “people are beginning to question...what the AMA’s clout is” and “they are just shooting themselves in the foot and no one can figure out what they are doing.” Not a very good position to be in during a critical time for the nation’s doctors.

With the Medicare question unanswered, health reform beginning to unveil its impact and the economy beginning to right itself, now, more than ever, the AMA should be a true voice for its constituents. Instead, Capitol Hill believes that voice is more of a whisper or a mumble at best, if you believe Politico’s sources.

In response to the quotes, new AMA President Cecil B. Wilson told Politico (via a statement) that the organization stands by its “strong, principled advocacy” regarding health reform and the repeal of the sustainable growth rate (SGR) as part of the Medicare cuts. Wilson said the AMA is “strong advocates of personal reform” and would not accept proposals that counter that stance.

Some have questioned the AMA’s true representation of its members and even recent studies have shown the group’s position on health care reform did not mirror its membership.

Perhaps new leadership will bring a renewed relevance on Capitol Hill, but doctors cannot wait long for that to happen.

Members rely on associations like the AMA and other professional groups to do what their elected members of Congress are tasked with doing: represent our best interests.

With the economy the way it is, and given a potential lack of revenue due to lingering Medicare cuts, doctors may vote with their checkbooks to stop backing the AMA on an annual basis and instead, find a candidate organization that will truly represent their beliefs in Washington, D.C.

Disclosures:

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