

**NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
Government Affairs Committee
*DRAFT MINUTES***

**GRAND AMERICA HOTEL
Salt Lake City, UT**

**Tuesday, May 13, 2003
8:00 – 10:30 a.m.**

Attendees:

George Miller, Chair
Sam Tessen
Tony Fay
Michael French
Ramsey Longbotham
Gary Wingrove
Lauri Paoli
Jim Speer

Ray Stowers, D.O.
Alfred Pheley
John Sheehan
Keith Mueller, Ph.D.
Suzanne Lavergne
Harry Lowd
Robert Brooks, M.D.
Deb Fischer-Clemens

Beth Landon
Carl Baker
Rebecca Slifkin, Ph.D.
Jeanette VanderMeer
Wayne Hellerstedt
Glen Massengale

Guests:

Bill Houghton
Gail Bellamy
Fred Johnson

Staff in Attendance:

Alan Morgan, Vice President, Government Affairs and Policy
Eli Briggs, Policy and State Affairs Manager
Greg Lynskey, Government Affairs Manager
Shelly Ten Napel, Organizational Development Manager

8:00 a.m.

Call to Order, Introductions, Approval of Agenda - *Miller*

George Miller called the meeting to order. The agenda was approved with additions for new business. Members, staff and guests introduced themselves.

Consent Calendar:

Minutes from the March 3, 2003 meeting were reviewed, amended, and approved.

Rural Health Policy Institute Review - *Morgan*

Morgan provided a report on the outcome of the 14th Annual Rural Health Policy Institute. Approximately 350 attendees participated in the conference, far exceeding expectations. More than \$45,000 was raised for corporate sponsorship of the meeting, and the expenses for the meeting were under budget. A change for the 15th Annual meeting will be that the legislative awards will be presented during the meeting itself, and not during the Capitol Hill reception. Committee members were urged to provide staff with any additional suggestions on how to improve upon the successful conference.

Follow up on issues discussed during the March meeting – *Morgan*

Universal Services Fund for telehealth applications – Per the recommendations of the GAC, a policy brief was developed for consideration by the Policy Board. A

future meeting with FCC officials to discuss concerns with the USF was established for June, an informational session at the Annual Conference is planned as well as an educational conference call on the topic.

CMS Bad Debt issue – Since the March meeting, NRHA submitted official comments to CMS on the issue, the document can be viewed on the NRHA web site. An action alert was sent to all NRHA members, with a draft letter to CMS attached. NRHA will wait on the CMS response to public comments, and then pursue a legislative strategy if necessary to address the issue.

Home Health- The 10% rural add-on for Medicare payments expired on April 1. NRHA is coordinating efforts with the National Home Care Association, and legislation will soon be introduced in Congress to retroactively address the issue for rural providers.

Programs for All Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) – NRHA will apply with the National PACE Association (NPA) for a grant to develop a national rural pace resource center. NRHA is also working with NPA to advocate for a rural PACE demonstration program.

Government Affairs Update – *Morgan and Lynskey*

Lynskey updated the committee on the status of rural provisions in the House and Senate. An initial outline of the House and Senate Rural Health Caucus provider bill was discussed, as well as the progress of the Caucus' rural hospitals bill. Also discussed was the timeframe for a Medicare Prescription Drug bill, the competing proposals for the bill, and the various strategic options available for using the prescription drug debate to move Medicare rural equity provisions.

NRHA sent a letter to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committee requesting a hearing on health professions program reauthorization as soon as possible.

New Business

Advocacy priorities - NRHA staff was questioned about the advocacy priorities of NRHA. While the priorities of the association remain Access, Quality and Equity, it was the consensus of the Committee that individual Constituency Groups certainly could develop a priority list among their issues. The Chair called on CG members present at the meeting to discuss this issue at their respective CGs, and to report back to the GAC during the fall meeting.

The committee discussed the issue of developing a position on the definition of rural. NRHA is currently developing a policy paper on the issue of Rural Urban Commuting Areas (RUCA) and the committee discussed how this issue might be included in this discussion.

The Rising Cost of Health Insurance – In response to growing Congressional interest, a task force was requested to create NRHA policy recommendations on the rising cost of and access to health insurance. Many states are seeing insurance carriers eliminate individual policies. As a result, in many rural areas, there is little or no access to individual insurance policies.

Volunteering for a task force created by the Policy Board on this issue was: Jeff Hanson, David Hartley, Tim Size, Deb Fisher-Clemens, Tony Fay, Gail Bellamy and Harry Lowd.

An issue was raised concerning the health and safety implications of gas and oil pipelines running through rural areas.

Adjourn

Miller adjourned the meeting.