



Health Policy Briefing

November 30, 2015

Senate May Expand Repeal of ACA in Reconciliation Bill

Upon return from Congress' week long recess, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has scheduled a meeting for Senate Republicans to discuss provisions to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) through the reconciliation process. Many Senate Republicans hope to restore repeal of the individual and employer mandates, which was removed from the House-passed budget reconciliation bill following evaluation of the legislation by the Senate parliamentarian, who found that these provisions could not be repealed under reconciliation in their current form. One possible way to include repeal is through changing the fines for not complying with the mandates to \$0, a move that would create a budgetary impact – a requirement for measures passed by reconciliation. If the bill has the 51 votes needed to pass following the Republican conference meeting on November 30, the Senate could begin consideration of reconciliation on the floor this week. By expanding repeal of the ACA, conservative GOP senators who had previously expressed concerns about partial repeal may be persuaded to vote for the legislation. But it is still possible that the bill would lose the votes of more moderate Republican members who oppose the defunding of Planned Parenthood.

Panel Calls for Overhaul of World Health Organization

The Independent Panel on the Global Response to Ebola released a **report** last week calling for a rebuilding of the World Health Organization's (WHO) emergency response capacity in order to better protect against future crises following the West African Ebola outbreak. The panel is composed of international experts in academics, research, and non-governmental organizations and was convened by the Harvard Global Health Institute and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The report recommends that the global health agency eliminate unnecessary programs and focus on its abilities that WHO is uniquely capable

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of handling. The panel also argues that funding should not be tied to specific programs, and points out that four out of five dollars the agency receives is earmarked by donors. The report indicts WHO leadership, calling for a strong leader capable of controlling member states, and urges the creation of a global health committee to call attention to emerging health crises. Recent figures indicate that the Ebola outbreak killed 11,314 and infected 28,634 people.

Shaheen Pushes for Funding Increase to Combat Heroin and Opioid Abuse Epidemic

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) has proposed \$600 million in emergency supplemental funding for health care and law enforcement expenses associated with addressing the heroin and opioid abuse epidemic. Some of this funding would be allocated to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help states track and reduce prescription drug abuse. Sen. Shaheen also sent a **letter** to Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Sylvia Mathews Burwell seeking administrative support for the increased funding proposal. The budget deal reached earlier this year included increased flexibility for Appropriations committees to assemble and pass spending bills by December 11 in order to avoid a federal government shutdown.

Speaker Ryan Convenes “Kitchen Cabinet”

Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) has convened an informal “kitchen cabinet” to act as a sounding board for feedback on proposed fiscal priorities and potentially contentious issues facing the House Republican caucus. The eight regular members of the advisory group include Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, Charlie Dent (R-Pa.) and Robert J. Dold (R-Ill.), representing the Tuesday Group, Bill Flores (R-Texas), chairman of the Republican Study Committee and Committee member Kristi Noem (R-S.D.), Budget Chairman Tom Price (R-Ga.), Financial Services Chairman Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas), and Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.). The group will likely weigh in on the fiscal year 2016 omnibus spending bill and the year-end package of tax break extensions.

CDC Makes Recommendations on HIV Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that people at high risk for HIV should use a therapy known as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in the form of Truvada, a daily pill. The therapy makes it more difficult for a virus to result in a permanent infection. The CDC notes that as of this year, 34 percent of primary care doctors and nurses had never heard of PrEP, and conclude that if more health care providers knew about and prescribed PrEP, more HIV infections could be prevented and chances of passing the virus to others could be reduced.

Affordable Care Act News

Urban Institute Counters Evidence of Premium Increases

Research conducted by the Urban Institute indicates that predictions of significant premium increases for consumers in the health insurance marketplace may have been overestimated. The report examined the final approved rates for 2016 and found a 4.3 percent increase in the average premium of the lowest-cost silver plan across 20 states and the District of Columbia last year. The Urban Institute found that the average premium in these plans increased by less than 5 percent in five states. In another five states, premiums increased between 5 and 10 percent, and increased by more than 10 percent in four states. And in six states plus the District of Columbia, the average premium of the lowest-cost silver plan actually decreased. The authors of the study conclude that some insurers may have priced aggressively in order to gain market share, before modifying that strategy this year. The researchers believe that it may take several more years before insurance risk pools and premium rates begin to stabilize.

Increase in Cervical Cancer Detection Linked to ACA

The substantial increase in the diagnosis of early stage cervical cancer in women under the age of 26 may be an effect of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), according to research from the American Cancer Society. The 2010 health care law allows dependents to stay on their parents' health insurance until age 26, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of uninsured young adults. Researchers using the National Cancer Data Base, a hospital-based registry that includes approximately 70 percent of all cancer cases in the country, found that early-stage diagnoses rose substantially among women aged 21 to 25 after the ACA provision went into affect. Between 2011-2012, 79 percent of women in this age group had an early-stage diagnosis, up from 71 percent in 2007-2009.

Upcoming Congressional Meetings and Hearings

House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Operations hearing titled: "Office of National Drug Control Policy: Reauthorization;" 10:00 a.m.; 2154 Rayburn Bldg.; December 2.

House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing titled: "Legislative Hearing on: H.R. 3262; H.R. 3484; H.R. 4056; a draft bill to amend the Veterans' Benefits Programs Improvement Act of 1991 to authorize VA to sell Pershing Hall; and, VA's legislative proposal regarding fiscal year 2016 construction projects;" 10:00 a.m.; 334 Cannon Bldg.; December 8.

House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing titled: "Fact Check: An End of Year Review of Accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs;" 10:30 a.m.; 334 Cannon Bldg.; December 9.

Senate Special Aging Committee hearing on prescription drug prices; time and place TBA; December 9