



Health Policy Briefing

August 28, 2017

Health Care Hearings Scheduled for September

Leadership on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee have announced two health care hearings scheduled for the first week of September. On September 6, the Committee will hear from state insurance commissioners about “Stabilizing Premiums and Helping Individuals in the Individual Insurance Market for 2018.” Insurance commissioners Mike Kreidler from Washington, Julie Mix McPeak from Tennessee, Teresa Miller from Pennsylvania, John Doak from Oklahoma, and Lori Wing-Heier from Alaska are scheduled to appear. On September 7, a panel of governors will testify on the same subject. Witnesses will include Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, and Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam. According to Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-Wash.), the HELP Committee plans to hold additional bipartisan hearings on the individual insurance market later in the year. The Committee is working to draft a stabilization package by mid-September, which it hopes to pass by the end of the month.

GOP Agenda for Post-August Recess

Republican leadership in the House of Representatives has outlined their legislative priorities for when Congress returns from August recess on September 5. They plan to tackle a spending package covering the eight remaining appropriations bills that have yet to be passed. If successful, this package would be combined with the four-bill “minibus” the House passed earlier in the year. The minibus included funding for the Department of Defense and other security-related bills. The 12-bill omnibus would then be sent to the Senate which has not yet passed any appropriations bills. Lawmakers must act to fund the government by the end of the fiscal year (FY), September 30. The House has only 12 days in session during the month of September and the Senate has 17 days scheduled. Lawmakers will also have to address the debt limit increase before the end of September and House Republicans hope to pass a FY 2018 budget, which could begin the process for tax reform. Reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) is also on the agenda. Funding for CHIP expires on September 30.

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Senate Dems Comment on Menthol Cigarettes

A group of Senate Democrats have written to Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Scott Gottlieb requesting that menthol cigarettes be removed from the marketplace. The lawmakers cite substantial scientific data that menthol cigarettes pose a public health risk greater than that seen with non-menthol products. They also argue that menthol cigarettes serve as a “starter product” for younger Americans, and are often disproportionately targeted toward African-Americans. The letter asks why the FDA has not finalized proposed rulemaking to remove menthol from cigarettes, and when the agency plans to finalize such regulations. The letter was signed by Sens. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.).

FDA Staff Sherman to Serve as Deputy Commissioner

Commissioner of Food and Drugs Scott Gottlieb has appointed longtime staffer Rachel Sherman to be principle deputy commissioner at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Dr. Sherman is an internist with a subspecialty in infectious diseases and has worked at the FDA for 25 years, and currently serves as the director of the Office of Medical Products and Tobacco. She worked closely with former Commissioner Robert Califf. There are no plans to appoint a replacement to the Office of Medical Products, as the agency is currently realigning its leadership so that agency center heads report directly to the commissioner. Gottlieb and Sherman will continue to oversee the functions of the Office of Medical Products and Tobacco. Sherman will also work with the Commissioner on the FDA’s Opioid Policy Steering Committee, and on a pilot project aimed at hiring additional staff to review prescription drugs.

No Bare Exchange Counties in 2018

Last week, CareSource and the Ohio Department of Insurance announced that Paulding County will have insurance coverage for the coming year on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchange. This announcement means that no county will lack available insurance coverage for the coming year.

Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Meetings

House Committee on Veterans; Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Field Hearing: VA Home Telehealth: Looking Behind the Numbers; 8:30 a.m., Garfield Charter Township Board Room, 3848 Veterans Drive, Traverse City, MI 49684; August 30

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee hearing on Stabilizing Premiums and Helping Individuals in the Individual Insurance Market for 2018: State Insurance Commissioners; 10:00 a.m., 430 Dirksen Bldg.; September 6

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee hearing on Stabilizing Premiums and Helping Individuals in the Individual Insurance Market for 2018: Governors; 9:00 a.m., 430 Dirksen Bldg.; September 7