

HALL RENDER'S THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON - OCTOBER 18, 2019

HOUSE COMMITTEES ADVANCE PELOSI DRUG PLAN

Thursday was a busy day in Washington as the lower chamber tackled drug pricing legislation. The House Energy and Commerce Committee advanced (30-22) an updated version ([H.R. 3](#)) of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's drug pricing reform package and the House Education and Labor Committee also passed it on a party-line vote (27-21). Meanwhile, the House Ways and Means Committee is expected to mark up this same legislative package next week. A Congressional Budget Office ("CBO") analysis of the bill states that the core component of the plan would save the federal government \$345 billion over a seven-year period by allowing the government to negotiate the cost on at least 35 medicines. Opponents of the bill were quick to note that CBO's analysis also shows the bill would result in drug companies producing 8 to 15 fewer new drugs per year than the 30 currently produced today.

At the Energy and Commerce Committee, only one amendment was adopted despite a hearing that lasted for more than eight hours. This amendment, offered by Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR), would increase Medicare Part B reimbursement for biosimilars for five years. Additionally, the committee approved separate bills via voice vote that would direct some of the expected savings from the required government drug price negotiations to new dental, vision and hearing benefits for seniors in Medicare, as well as new financial support for low-income Medicare beneficiaries. Republicans opposed to the bill argued that the House should not be working on a package that has no chance of passing the Republican-controlled Senate when there are other bipartisan drug bills with a better shot of becoming law. While a House floor vote on the Pelosi bill is expected this month, the measure will not advance in the Senate where Republicans are working to advance a bill authored by Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-IA).

SENATE TO VOTE ON SPENDING BILLS NEXT WEEK

With government funding set to expire on November 21, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Thursday that he will attempt a two-pronged strategy starting next week to move FY 2020 spending bills. First, the Senate will focus on a domestic funding package with bipartisan support, and second, a defense-related measure that also includes the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations measure. The Senate Appropriations Committee has reported 10 of the 12 FY 2020 bills out of committee, with eight of those bills having bipartisan support. However, Labor-HHS-Education is one of the measures without bipartisan agreement.

Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Chairman Roy Blunt (R-MO) said he's hopeful appropriators can reach an agreement in the coming weeks and avoid another stopgap. A fact sheet on the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations measure passed by the Senate Appropriations Committee can be found [here](#). The House passed its Labor, Education, and HHS [funding measure](#) in June. Congressional leaders have yet to reconcile the policy differences between the House and Senate spending bills and have not agreed on a common set of funding limits for those measures.

HEALTH-RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK

Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL) introduced [H.R. 4698](#) to amend the HITECH Act to allow an individual to obtain a copy of such individual's protected health information at no cost unless certain circumstances apply.

Rep. Bradley Schneider (D-IL) introduced [H.R. 4676](#) to amend Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for the guaranteed issue of Medigap policies to all Medigap-eligible Medicare beneficiaries and Medicare Advantage enrollee.

Rep. Andy Kim (D-NJ) introduced [H.R. 4671](#) to amend Titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to reduce cost-sharing, align income and resource eligibility tests, simplify enrollment and provide for other program improvements for low-income Medicare beneficiaries.

Rep. Kim Schrier (D-WA) introduced [H.R. 4665](#) to amend Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide coverage for certain vision items and services under part B of the Medicare program.

Rep. Robin Kelly (D-IL) introduced [H.R. 4650](#), the Medicare Dental Act of 2019.

NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON

Congress returns next week when it will focus on passing appropriations measures and addressing impeachment issues. The House will also

continue to honor the legacy of Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MA), Chairman of the House Oversight Committee, who passed away on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the House Energy and Commerce Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee will hold a **hearing** called “Sabotage: The Trump Administration’s Attack on Health Care”, at which CMS Administrator Seema Verma is expected to testify. On the Senate side, the Finance Committee will hold a **hearing** on "Treating Substance Misuse in America: Scams, Shortfalls and Solutions" on Thursday that will feature testimony from U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams.

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