HALL RENDER'S THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON – JUNE 2, 2017

SENATE REPUBLICANS BEGIN WORK ON AHCA

Republican senators will work through June to make what are expected to be major changes to the House-passed American Health Care Act ("AHCA"). When Congress returns the week of June 5, Senate leadership is expected to distribute a first draft of their version of the health care reform bill to Republican Senate offices. According to Senate aides, Republican leadership and Senate committees with health care jurisdiction have been crafting the legislative text with input from rank and file Republican members. However, Senate Democrats have not been asked to participate in the process.

The legislation comes more than a week after the Congressional Budget Office ("CBO") confirmed that the AHCA meets the Senate's procedural requirement of saving at least $2 billion over 10 years. In its report, the CBO detailed that 14 million fewer people will be insured one year after passage and 23 million fewer will be insured in 10 years. These numbers alone will make it difficult for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) to deliver the 50 votes needed for passage. The CBO also estimated that the AHCA would cut spending on Medicaid by $834 billion and the program would cover 14 million fewer people.

Republicans in the Senate have made no secret that they intend to substantially change the AHCA to make it more moderate in order to get the 50 votes for passage (Vice President Pence would break a 50/50 tie). The changes are expected to include increased funding for rural hospitals that lose subsidies under Affordable Care Act repeal, providing a larger share of tax credits to lower income consumers nearing Medicare age (aged 50 to 64) and beefing up the high-risk pool funding for states.

The most optimistic timeline for Senate passage is by the July 4 holiday recess, which begins June 30. A more realistic estimate would bring the bill to the Senate floor before the beginning of August.

HHS ANNOUNCES NEW OPIOID ADDICTION TREATMENT GRANTS

On May 31, HHS announced it will make $70 million in new funding available to communities and health care providers to help prevent opioid overdose deaths and treat people with opioid use disorders. The grants include up to $28 million to help states increase access to medication-assisted treatment and $41.7 million over four years to help local governments train and provide resources to administer emergency treatment. The funding comes in addition to $485 million in grants HHS announced in April, which stems from the 21st Century Cures Act to address opioid abuse prevention, treatment and recovery.

HEALTH-RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK

There were no health-related bills introduced this week as Congress was out of session.

NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON

The Senate and House return on Monday and Tuesday of next week to begin their summer session. Both chambers are scheduled to be in session for seven of the next eight weeks, one of the busiest stretches of the legislative calendar.

On Wednesday or Thursday of next week, the House Energy and Commerce Committee is expected to mark up its FDA user fee reauthorization bill. Earlier in May, the Senate HELP Committee advanced its version of the FDA user fee bill with bipartisan support.

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