
Health Law Daily Wrap Up

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By Bryant Storm, J.D.

The House Ways and Means Committee became the first legislative panel to approve the American Health Care Act (AHCA). The committee voted to approve the legislation along party lines in a 23-16 vote, following a session that stretched for nearly 18 hours. The committee’s approval comes against a backdrop of political controversy and industry opposition, with groups like the American Medical Association, American Hospital Association, and AARP saying that the legislation will create a drop in health insurance coverage which will harm patients. Democrats raised complaints over the fact that hearings are taking place before the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has been given a chance to "score" the bill.

Energy and Commerce. The Energy and Commerce committee also voted to pass the AHCA. The legislation will undergo additional scrutiny when the Budget Committee compiles the bills from each committee into a single reconciliation package. The energy and commerce bill, which primarily focuses on Medicaid, would give states greater authority over spending, establish a per capita allotment system, and freeze new enrollment for Medicaid expansion by 2020.

Not repeal. Although the legislation is being touted as an effort to repeal and replace the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) (P.L. 111-148). The American Health Care Act, which is a combination of two House bills, does not, in fact, go that far. The proposed legislation would, however, make substantial changes to some of the ACA’s controversial provisions, including the individual health insurance mandate, the inclusion of abortion services among minimum benefit requirements, Medicaid expansion, and several new taxes imposed by the health reform law (see Republicans present health reform that is neither repeal nor replacement, March 7, 2017).

Support. The opposition to the Republican health care law is not strictly divided by party affiliation. Some conservative lawmakers and groups claim the bill is an unnecessarily timid approach to health care reform. On the other side of the argument, both centrist members of the Republican Party and Republican governors expressed concern over the losses in Medicaid funding which would result from the law’s overhaul of Medicaid expansion. House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) responded to those concerns, saying, “This is what good, conservative health care reform looks like. It is bold and it is long overdue, and it is us fulfilling our promises.”