



Health Policy Briefing

January 6, 2025

Johnson Reelected House Speaker

Republican Representative Mike Johnson (R-La.) was reelected speaker of the House on Friday. Johnson narrowly secured the speakership with 218 votes to House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries' (D-N.Y.) 215 votes. Two last-minute conservative holdouts - Reps. Keith Self (R-Texas) and Ralph Norman (R-S.C.) - switched their votes to Johnson after initially voting for other candidates. The lawmakers faced pressure from President-elect Donald Trump to drop their opposition to Johnson, and were offered assurances from Johnson that he would "involve members at every level." Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) was ultimately the only Republican to vote in opposition to Johnson. While the GOP will control the White House and both chambers of Congress come Inauguration Day, Johnson will lead the House of Representatives with the slimmest margin of control either party has held since 1930.

The House also adopted a rules package for the 119th Congress last week. The package is largely in line with the chamber's rules from the 118th Congress, with several notable amendments. The threshold to oust the speaker of the House has been raised to nine members of the majority party. Former Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R) was voted out of leadership under a motion to vacate threshold of just a single majority member. The rules package also includes a provision to limit votes on suspensions measures — which require two-thirds support for passage — to just Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, as well as provisions to maintain the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party and direct the House Administration Committee, the House clerk, the chief administrative officer, and other officials to continue to integrate AI technologies into House operations and functions. The rules package tees up consideration of a dozen measures under a closed rule without any committee process, including legislation to require health care providers to provide necessary medical care to a child who survives an abortion attempt, as well as a bill to permanently classify fentanyl-related substances as Schedule I drugs.

The National Weather Service has issued a winter storm warning for the District of Columbia, with snowfall forecast from late Sunday through early Tuesday. Congress is due to certify the results of the November

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presidential election tomorrow. “The Electoral Count Act requires this on January 6 at 1 p.m. - so, whether we’re in a blizzard or not we’re going to be in that chamber making sure this is done,” Johnson stated over the weekend.

Former President Jimmy Carter Dies at Age 100

Former President Jimmy Carter (D), the 39th president of the United States, passed away on December 29 at the age of 100. During his presidency Carter prioritized efforts to improve the nation’s mental health care system. Early in his term, President Carter established the Presidential Commission on Mental Health, building upon similar efforts he initiated while serving as governor of Georgia. Later in his presidency, Carter advocated for a National Health Plan aimed at creating a framework for achieving universal health coverage. After leaving office, Carter devoted himself to philanthropy, most notably through his work with Habitat for Humanity and the establishment of the Carter Center, which has focused on the elimination of preventable diseases. In 2002, Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his tireless work to promote human rights, facilitate peace negotiations, and advance social welfare. The former president will lie in state at the Capitol from the afternoon of January 7 through the morning of January 9; the building will be open to the public during designated times for those who wish to pay their respects. A memorial service will be held at the Washington National Cathedral on January 9. Federal offices and financial markets will be closed on Thursday in observation of a national day of mourning, while flags will be flown at half-staff at the White House and government offices and grounds for 30 days.

Republicans Begin Outlining Agendas for 119th Congress

Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) pledged to preserve the legislative filibuster during his first remarks as the new Senate majority leader on the floor last week. He also stated his intention to bring appropriations bills to the floor for votes during his leadership tenure. Thune previewed his agenda for the chamber’s first 10 weeks in session, outlining his plans to focus first on confirmation of President Donald Trump’s nominations. Senators were sworn in on Friday with the commencement of the 119th Congress. Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) was sworn in as president pro tempore.

In the House of Representatives, leadership has told members that they will attempt to tie a \$1.5 trillion increase to the nation’s debt limit to \$2.5 trillion in spending cuts over the next decade. The GOP will try to advance the proposal via the budget reconciliation process. GOP leadership did not specify what spending would be targeted for cuts. The 2023 suspension of the debt limit expired on January 1, but the Treasury Department can extend the effective deadline, likely until mid-2025, through the use of so-called extraordinary measures to temporarily keep the government from defaulting on its debt.

Updates to Congressional Committee Assignments

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) has [announced](#) Senate Democrat committee assignments for the 119th Congress. Of note are changes that will impact congressional panels with health care jurisdiction. Joining the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee are newly elected senators Angela Alsobrooks (Md.), Lisa Blunt Rochester (Del.), and Andy Kim (N.J.). Sens. Ben Ray Lujan (N.M.) and Tina Smith (Minn.) will depart the HELP Committee but join the Finance Committee, along with Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Raphael Warnock (Ga.), and Peter Welch (Vt.), who are also joining Finance.

Lawmakers Consider Next Steps for 21st Century Cures

Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) and former Rep. Larry Bucshon, M.D. (R-Ind.) have released a [roadmap](#) of next steps for the **Cures 2.0 Act** and the 21st Century Cures initiative. The lawmakers issued a request for information last year that received more than 300 responses and recommendations to further innovation and access to quality health care. According to a [press release](#) from Rep. DeGette's office, a potential "Cures 2.1" update would aim to:

- Create an environment that enables the rapid and appropriate deployment of innovative technologies to improve health outcomes;
- Build a health care infrastructure that enables information sharing, continuous evidence gathering, and implementation of new knowledge; and
- Foster innovations that improve public health, promote patient-centric care, reduce the burden of chronic disease, and conserve valuable resources.

Make America Healthy Again Caucus Established in the House

Reps. Vern Buchanan (R-Fla.), John Joyce, M.D. (R-Pa.), and Lloyd Smucker (R-Pa.) announced the formation of a Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Caucus. The caucus will "focus on supporting Americans in living long, healthy and fulfilling lives through access to affordable, high-quality foods while improving access to primary care." The establishment of the House caucus follows the recent formation of a MAHA Caucus in the Senate led by Sen. Roger Marshall, M.D. (R-Kan.), Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.), Rick Scott (R-Fla.), Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) and Ron Johnson (R-Wis.).

Recently Introduced Health Legislation

S.Res.938 — A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that it is the duty of the Federal Government to dramatically expand and strengthen the care economy; Sponsor: Warren, Elizabeth [Sen.-D-MA]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.3 — A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to waive cost-sharing for advance care planning services, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Warner, Mark R. [Sen.-D-VA]; Committees: Senate - Finance

S.5640 — A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to protect children's health by denying any deduction for advertising and marketing directed at children to promote the consumption of food of poor nutritional quality; Sponsor: Blumenthal, Richard [Sen.-D-CT]; Committees: Senate - Finance

H.R.10548 — To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to protect children's health by denying any deduction for advertising and marketing directed at children to promote the consumption of food of poor nutritional quality; Sponsor: DeLauro, Rosa L. [Rep.-D-CT-3]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Education and the Workforce