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Congress Passes Stopgap Spending Bill

Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) last week ahead of Friday's deadline for avoiding a federal government shutdown. The *Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025* mostly funds the federal government at current discretionary spending levels through the end of fiscal year 2025 on September 30. It also extends the health provisions, including telehealth flexibilities, that were included in the December 2024 CR until September 30/October 1, 2025. It does not include any additional health provisions such as an update to Medicare physician fee schedule payments. The House of Representatives passed the seven-month funding patch on Tuesday in a 217-213 vote. Democrat Jared Golden (ME) voted yes, while Republican Thomas Massie (KY) voted no. The bill was passed by the Senate on Friday in a 54-46 vote. Sens. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) and Angus King (I-Maine) voted yes, while Sen. Rand Paul, MD (R-Ky.) voted no.

In the days leading up to the vote, Senate Democrats had weighed the potential consequences of forcing a government shutdown, with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) eventually concluding that a shutdown was not worth the risk of empowering the Trump administration and Department of Government Efficiency to make further cuts to government agencies. Eight Democratic votes were necessary to meet the 60-vote procedural threshold prior to final bill passage. Ten Democrats – Sens. Schumer, John Fetterman (Pa.), Catherine Cortez Masto (Nev.), Dick Durbin (Ill.), Brian Schatz (Hawaii), Gary Peters (Mich.), Kirsten Gillibrand (N.Y.), Maggie Hassan (N.H.), Jeanne Shaheen (N.H.), and Angus King (I-Maine) — ultimately joined Republicans in voting to advance the bill, setting up final passage later that day.

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Murphy, Carter Secure Assurances on Reconciliation Package

Republican leadership of the House of Representatives reportedly have agreed to address cuts to Medicare physician payments in the forthcoming reconciliation bill to advance President Donald Trump's domestic policy agenda. Rep. Greg Murphy, MD (R-N.C.) announced in a social media post last week that Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) and Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-La.) will eliminate the 2.8% physician payment cut that took effect in January via the budget reconciliation process. Murphy, who co-chairs the GOP Doctors Caucus, had originally pushed for inclusion of the doc-fix in the December 2024 year-end package, and again in the continuing resolution passed last week. Congress is also under pressure from physician organizations to address the cut: more than 100 groups wrote to lawmakers asking them to take a stand to protect Medicare patient access and insist that language on the 2025 Medicare physician payment cut be added to the government funding package before the vote.

Rep. Buddy Carter (R-Ga.) told reporters last week that he too had received a commitment from GOP leadership to include measures to overhaul the pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) industry in the Republican reconciliation bill. Carter chairs the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health and is a champion of PBM reform. He recently acknowledged that PBM regulations for the commercial market are unlikely to qualify under the Senate's Byrd rule, which dictates what provisions can be included in a budget reconciliation package. Carter believes PBM proposals impacting Medicare and Medicaid, however, would qualify.

Democratic Physician Lawmakers Form New Caucus

The Congressional Doctors Caucus has officially been included in the 119th Congressional Member and Staff
Organizations (Caucuses) list. The co-chairs include all six Democratic physicians in the House of Representatives:
Ami Bera (CA), Raul Ruiz (CA), Kim Schrier (WA), Maxine Dexter (OR), Kelly Morrison (MN), and Herb Conaway
(NJ). Upon passage of the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 last week, the group released a statement criticizing Republicans' failure to include a fix to the physician fee schedule cuts that went into effect at the start of 2025. "The Trump Administration and Republican leadership has once again turned its back on physicians and patients across the country... These reimbursement cuts will only worsen the physician workforce shortage, increase consolidation in the health care industry, close rural practices, and further drive up costs for seniors," the lawmakers stated.

Trump Administration Health Personnel Update

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee advanced the nominations of Martin Makary, MD to serve as Commissioner of Food and Drugs, and Jay Bhattacharya, MD to serve as Director of the National Institutes of Health. Democrats Maggie Hassan (N.H.) and John Hickenlooper (Colo.) joined Republicans in support of Makary's nomination, which advanced in a 14-9 vote. Bhattacharya's nomination was advanced in a 12-11 party-line vote. Both nominees are expected to be confirmed by the full Senate when they return from a scheduled recess.

The White House withdrew the nomination of Dave Weldon, MD to serve as Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Thursday, the same day Dr. Weldon was scheduled to appear before the HELP Committee for the first ever CDC director confirmation hearing. HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy, MD (R-La.) stated that the panel did not have the votes to advance Weldon's nomination. According to reports, some Senate Republicans had raised concerns about the nominee's views on vaccines, as well as his lack of strategic vision for the CDC and understanding of how the agency operates. During his time in Congress, the former Florida GOP representative repeatedly questioned the safety of vaccines and promoted the claim that vaccines cause autism. The White House has not yet announced a new nominee to lead the CDC.

Mehmet Oz, MD appeared before the Senate Finance Committee for his nomination hearing to serve as Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. During his testimony, Dr. Oz – one of the nation's best-known doctors and a former U.S. Senate candidate – highlighted the three big ideas he will pursue if confirmed by the Senate: empowering beneficiaries with better tools and more transparency so they can better manage their health and navigate the

complex health care system; incentivizing health care providers to optimize their care with real time information within their workflow; and modernizing tools to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse. During the hearing, Oz faced questions about potential cuts to the Medicaid program as well as how to address Medicare Advantage's (MA) use of prior authorization and improve the overall value of the MA program.

Cassidy Forms CDC Working Group

Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy, MD (R-La.) announced the formation of a GOP working group to reform the CDC. In a press release to mark the launch of the working group, Cassidy cited his concerns with the weaknesses of the agency that were exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. "The public depends on CDC to deliver clear, unbiased health guidance, especially in times of crisis," Cassidy stated. "While I'm encouraged the Trump administration is committed to improving health transparency, we need lasting legislative reforms to ensure CDC is able to meet Americans' public health needs." The group is comprised of Sens. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), Mike Lee (R-Utah), Roger Marshall, MD (R-Kan.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Rand Paul, MD (R-Ky.), and Tim Scott (R-S.C.).

Shaheen Announces Plans to Retire

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) announced last week that she will not run for reelection next year. Shaheen was first elected to the Senate in 2008. She currently serves on the Appropriations Committee and is the top-ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. She is the third Senate Democrat to announce their retirement this year, alongside Sens. Gary Peters (Mich.) and Tina Smith (Minn.).

Arizona Democrat Raúl Grijalva Dies at 77

Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) passed away on March 13 at the age of 77. The Arizona congressman was undergoing treatment for lung cancer. First elected to Congress in 2002, he served as a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, was Chair Emeritus of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and a member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. A special primary election will be held on July 15 and a special general election on September 23. Until his seat is filled, the GOP will hold a 218-213 majority, meaning they can lose two Republicans on any party-line vote.

Medical Groups Urge NIH to Reconsider Indirect Cost Cap

Over 40 of the nation's leading medical organizations have sent a joint letter to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) expressing concerns over the agency's proposal to impose a 15% cap on indirect cost rates for all NIH grants. The letter underscores the potential impact of this change on the long-term sustainability of the U.S. biomedical research enterprise. "The collateral damage of this policy, if implemented, will be profound and generational, reshaping the future of scientific progress in ways that cannot be easily undone," the letter states. "Beyond its immediate financial strain, the policy introduces significant procedural and structural issues that undermine the integrity of federal research funding."

Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Markups

House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization oversight hearing "Closing the Data Gap: Improving Interoperability Between VA and Community Providers;" 3:00 p.m.; March 24

House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health oversight hearing "Breaking Down Barriers: Getting Veterans ACCESS to Lifesaving Care;" 2:30 p.m.; March 25

Hart Health Strategies Inc. Recently Introduced Health Legislation

S.921 — A bill to direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to issue guidance on whether hospital emergency departments should implement fentanyl testing as a routine procedure for patients experiencing an overdose, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Banks, Jim [Sen.-R-IN]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

H.Res.209 — Expressing support for the designation of April 5, 2025, as "Barth Syndrome Awareness Day"; Sponsor: Tonko, Paul [Rep.-D-NY-20]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.Res.210 — Supporting the goals and ideals of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day; Sponsor: Waters, Maxine [Rep.-D-CA-43]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Foreign Affairs

H.J.Res.76 — Providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Environmental Protection Agency relating to "Updates to New Chemicals Regulations Under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)"; Sponsor: Higgins, Clay [Rep.-R-LA-3]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.1968 — Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025; Sponsor: Cole, Tom [Rep.-R-OK-4]; Committees: House - Appropriations; Budget

H.R.1969 — To amend and reauthorize the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs; Sponsor: Miller-Meeks, Mariannette [Rep.-R-IA-1]; Committees: House - Veterans' Affairs

H.R.1970 — To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to reimburse State homes for the cost of, or to furnish to State homes, certain costly medications provided to veterans who receive nursing home care in such State homes, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Miller-Meeks, Mariannette [Rep.-R-IA-1]; Committees: House - Veterans' Affairs

H.R.1971 — To amend title 38, United States Code, to include adaptive prostheses and terminal devices for sports and other recreational activities in the medical services furnished to eligible veterans by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Sponsor: Miller-Meeks, Mariannette [Rep.-R-IA-1]; Committees: House - Veterans' Affairs

H.R.1972 — To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the period during which the referral of a veteran, made by a health care provider of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to a non-Department provider, for care or services under the Community Care Program of such Department, remains valid; Sponsor: Miller-Meeks, Mariannette [Rep.-R-IA-1]; Committees: House - Veterans' Affairs

H.R.1978 — To direct the Secretary of Defense to develop a strategy to treat obesity as a disease and reduce the prevalence of obesity in certain Armed Forces, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Buchanan, Vern [Rep.-R-FL-16]; Committees: House - Armed Services

H.R.1980 — To reauthorize and make improvements to the State medical stockpile pilot program administered by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response through fiscal year 2030; Sponsor: Carter, Earl L. "Buddy" [Rep.-R-GA-1]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.2001 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to reauthorize a grant program for addressing dental workforce needs; Sponsor: Kelly, Robin L. [Rep.-D-IL-2]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.2002 —To amend title XXX of the Public Health Service Act to establish standards and protocols to improve patient matching; Sponsor: Kelly, Mike [Rep.-R-PA-16]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means

- H.R.2004 To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to issue guidance on whether hospital emergency departments should implement fentanyl testing as a routine procedure for patients experiencing an overdose, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Lieu, Ted [Rep.-D-CA-36]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2005 To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to provide for certain adjustments to Medicare payment for items of durable medical equipment that were formerly included in round 2021 of the DMEPOS competitive bidding program; Sponsor: Miller-Meeks, Mariannette [Rep.-R-IA-1]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means
- H.R.2013 To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for eligibility for coverage of home health services under the Medicare program on the basis of a need for occupational therapy; Sponsor: Smucker, Lloyd [Rep.-R-PA-11]; Committees: House Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2015 To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to prohibit hospitals from taking into account vaccination status in selecting organ recipients; Sponsor: Steube, W. Gregory [Rep.-R-FL-17]; Committees: House Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce
- S.J.Res.36 A joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection relating to "Prohibition on Creditors and Consumer Reporting Agencies Concerning Medical Information (Regulation V)"; Sponsor: Rounds, Mike [Sen.-R-SD]; Committees: Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
- S.927 A bill to amend title XIX of the Social Security Act to ensure accurate payments to pharmacies under Medicaid and to prevent the use of abusive spread pricing practices under Medicaid; Sponsor: Welch, Peter [Sen.-D-VT]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.931 A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide incentives for behavioral health integration; Sponsor: Cortez Masto, Catherine [Sen.-D-NV]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.932 A bill to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act with respect to molecularly targeted pediatric cancer investigations, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Mullin, Markwayne [Sen.-R-OK]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.939 A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide coverage for dental and oral health care, hearing care, and vision care under the Medicare program; Sponsor: Sanders, Bernard [Sen.-I-VT]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.942 A bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide for interest-free deferment on student loans for borrowers serving in a medical or dental internship or residency program; Sponsor: Rosen, Jacky [Sen.-D-NV]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.946 A bill to clarify training requirements for prescribers of controlled substances; Sponsor: Bennet, Michael F. [Sen.-D-CO]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.957 A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to eliminate consideration of the income of organ recipients in providing reimbursement of expenses to donating individuals, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Lujan, Ben Ray [Sen.-D-NM]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.958 A bill to support the use of technology in maternal health care, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Lujan, Ben Ray [Sen.-D-NM]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

- H.R.2028 To amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide for interest-free deferment on student loans for borrowers serving in a medical or dental internship or residency program; Sponsor: Babin, Brian [Rep.-R-TX-36]; Committees: House Education and Workforce
- H.R.2039 To prohibit the President and the Secretary of Health and Human Services from declaring certain emergencies or disasters for the purpose of imposing gun control; Sponsor: Cloud, Michael [Rep.-R-TX-27]; Committees: House Transportation and Infrastructure; Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2040 To authorize funding for the creation and implementation of infant mortality pilot programs in standard metropolitan statistical areas with high rates of infant mortality, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Cohen, Steve [Rep.-D-TN-9]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2041 To amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 to clarify and strengthen the application of certain employer-sponsored health plan disclosure requirements; Sponsor: Courtney, Joe [Rep.-D-CT-2]; Committees: House Education and Workforce
- H.R.2044 To amend the Public Health Service Act to establish a grant program to provide self-harm and suicide prevention services in primary care offices, and for other purposes; Sponsor: DeSaulnier, Mark [Rep.-D-CA-10]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2045 To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for coverage of dental, vision, and hearing care under the Medicare program; Sponsor: Doggett, Lloyd [Rep.-D-TX-37]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means
- H.R.2048 To amend title II of the Social Security Act to eliminate the waiting periods for disability insurance benefits and Medicare coverage for individuals with metastatic breast cancer, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Garbarino, Andrew R. [Rep.-R-NY-2]; Committees: House Ways and Means
- H.R.2049 To prohibit the limitation of access to assisted reproductive technology, and all medical care surrounding such technology; Sponsor: Gillen, Laura [Rep.-D-NY-4]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2062 To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to treat membership in a health care sharing ministry as a medical expense, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Kelly, Mike [Rep.-R-PA-16]; Committees: House Ways and Means
- H.R.2068 To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the assignment of patient advocates at medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Moolenaar, John R. [Rep.-R-MI-2]; Committees: House Veterans' Affairs
- H.R.2075 To prohibit the Federal Government from conducting or supporting any research involving human fetal tissue that is obtained pursuant to an induced abortion, and to prohibit the solicitation or knowing acquisition, receipt, or acceptance of a donation of such tissue; Sponsor: Onder, Robert [Rep.-R-MO-3]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2079 To amend the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to reduce fraudulent enrollments in qualified health plans, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Ross, Deborah K. [Rep.-D-NC-2]; Committees: House Energy and Commerce
- H.R.2082 To amend title II of the Social Security Act to provide for long-term care insurance benefits, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Suozzi, Thomas R. [Rep.-D-NY-3]; Committees: House Ways and Means

- H.R.2085 To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for a credit against tax for expenses for translational research regarding neurodegenerative diseases and psychiatric conditions; Sponsor: Thompson, Mike [Rep.-D-CA-4]; Committees: House Ways and Means
- S.975 A bill to establish a grant program to support schools of medicine and schools of osteopathic medicine in underserved areas; Sponsor: Kaine, Tim [Sen.-D-VA]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.976 A bill to amend the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to reduce fraudulent enrollments in qualified health plans, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Wyden, Ron [Sen.-D-OR]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.977 A bill to prohibit taxpayer-funded gender transition procedures, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Marshall, Roger [Sen.-R-KS]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.983 A bill to direct the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to clarify that implanted active middle ear hearing devices are prosthetics and are not subject to the hearing aid coverage exclusion under the Medicare program; Sponsor: Klobuchar, Amy [Sen.-D-MN]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.987 A bill to prohibit the Federal Government from conducting, funding, approving, or otherwise supporting any research involving human fetal tissue that is obtained pursuant to an induced abortion, and to prohibit the solicitation or knowing acquisition, receipt, or acceptance of a donation of such issue; Sponsor: Hyde-Smith, Cindy [Sen.-R-MS]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.992 A bill to authorize funding for the creation and implementation of infant mortality pilot programs in standard metropolitan statistical areas with high rates of infant mortality, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Van Hollen, Chris [Sen.-D-MD]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.998 A bill to authorize the President to enter into trade agreements for the reciprocal elimination of duties or other import restrictions with respect to medical goods to contribute to the national security and public health of the United States, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Tillis, Thomas [Sen.-R-NC]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.999 A bill to reform the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, limit the scope of public health authorities, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Schmitt, Eric [Sen.-R-MO]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.1004 A bill to reauthorize the program to support residential treatment programs for pregnant and postpartum women, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Lujan, Ben Ray [Sen.-D-NM]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.1007 A bill to amend title V of the Public Health Service Act to secure the suicide prevention lifeline from cybersecurity incidents, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Mullin, Markwayne [Sen.-R-OK]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.1022 A bill to reauthorize the program for strengthening communities of recovery for individuals with substance use disorders; Sponsor: Lujan, Ben Ray [Sen.-D-NM]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.1031 A bill to amend Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to create a Radiation Oncology Case Rate Value Based Payment Program exempt from budget neutrality adjustment requirements, and to amend section 1128A of title XI of the Social Security Act to create a new statutory exception for the provision of free or discounted transportation for radiation oncology patients to receive radiation therapy services; Sponsor: Tillis, Thomas [Sen.-R-NC]; Committees: Senate Finance

- S.1036 A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to authorize fellowships under the Minority Fellowship Program to be awarded for training for professionals in the addiction medicine field; Sponsor: Cornyn, John [Sen.-R-TX]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.1040 A bill to amend the Federal Trade Commission Act to prohibit product hopping, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Cornyn, John [Sen.-R-TX]; Committees: Senate Judiciary
- S.1041 A bill to amend title 35, United States Code, to address the infringement of patents that claim biological products, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Cornyn, John [Sen.-R-TX]; Committees: Senate Judiciary
- S.1044 A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to make improvements to the redistribution of residency slots under the Medicare program after a hospital closes; Sponsor: Rosen, Jacky [Sen.-D-NV]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.1055 A bill to amend the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to modify the notification requirement for emergency contract health services for certain beneficiaries, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Rounds, Mike [Sen.-R-SD]; Committees: Senate Indian Affairs
- S.1056 A bill to establish a home-based telemental health care grant program for purposes of increasing mental health and substance use services in rural medically underserved populations and for individuals in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations; Sponsor: Rounds, Mike [Sen.-R-SD]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.1058 A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to clarify congressional intent and preserve patient access to home infusion therapy under the Medicare program, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Warner, Mark R. [Sen.-D-VA]; Committees: Senate Finance
- S.1062 A bill to authorize a pilot program to expand and intensify surveillance of self-harm in partnership with State and local public health departments, to establish a grant program to provide self-harm and suicide prevention services in hospital emergency departments, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Reed, Jack [Sen.-D-RI]; Committees: Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions