



Health Policy Briefing

October 20, 2025

Government Shutdown Update

During the third week of the government shutdown, Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-S.D.) continued to force votes on the continuing resolution (CR) passed by the House of Representatives last month. Senate Democrats have so far rejected the stopgap spending bill, which would extend government funding through November 21, ten times. The Senate GOP is no longer allowing Democrats to call up their alternate proposal for funding the government. Republicans continue to need the support of at least five more Democrats to overcome a filibuster of the stopgap spending bill, with three members of the Democratic caucus (Sens. Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-Nev.), John Fetterman (D-Pa.), and Angus King (I-Maine)) already backing the CR, and Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) remaining in opposition. Democrats are refusing to support any spending measure that does not extend the Affordable Care Act (ACA) advanced premium tax credits that are set to expire on December 31, while Republican leadership insists that the government be reopened before lawmakers debate the extension of the subsidies.

The House remains out of session, surpassing a month since the chamber's last vote. House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) has indicated that the House will remain out of session until the government is reopened, an approach aimed at pressuring the Senate to adopt the clean, House-passed CR. With no fiscal year 2026 spending bills having been signed into law, this is the longest government-wide shut down in the nation's history. The previous funding lapse impacting the entire federal government was in FY 2014 and lasted 16 days. While there have been no signs of progress that an agreement is close to being reached between Republican and Democratic congressional leadership and the Trump administration, ongoing conversations are taking place between a bipartisan group of rank-and-file senators about how to reopen the federal government. The group is reportedly considering the possibility of a one-year extension of the ACA subsidies paired with a package of longer-term reforms.

Federal district court judge Susan Illston has issued a temporary restraining order pending further arguments on the reductions in force (RIFs) that have taken place amidst the government shutdown. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) admitted it mistakenly fired 800 of the 1,760 people who received layoff notices, blaming data discrepancies and processing errors in a document filed as part of the case. HHS still wishes to pursue the firing of 982 employees. The court order will not have any immediate impact, given that workers are

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already on furlough and the layoffs were meant to go into effect on December 8. The American Federation of Government Employees, which brought the lawsuit against the Trump administration, has said that Centers for Disease Control and Prevention workers were the biggest target of HHS' latest RIF. Reports indicate that employees at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, and the Office of Population Affairs also received termination notices. The court is expected to hold a hearing for a preliminary injunction in the case in the next two weeks.

Senate Democrats Block Defense Appropriations Consideration

Senate Democrats blocked consideration of the annual Defense spending measure last week. The chamber voted 50-44 against proceeding to the bill, despite the measure being advanced out of committee with bipartisan support earlier this year. All but three Democrats opposed the procedural move to open debate on the bill. Republicans in the chamber had considered attaching the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies spending bill to the measure had it received enough votes to be considered. Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) argued that the GOP was not united enough within their own party to add other priorities to the Defense legislation.

Senate Republicans Continue Push for Mifepristone Safety Review

Republican lawmakers continue to press the Trump administration regarding the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval of a new generic version of the abortion drug mifepristone. Sen. Bill Cassidy, MD (R-La.) led a [letter](#) to FDA Commissioner Marty Makary, MD last week expressing concerns that the move undermines the President's pro-life agenda. The letter requests that the commissioner share details about the safety studies currently being conducted on the chemical abortion regimen. The letter was signed by Sens. Tommy Tuberville (Ala.), Rand Paul (Ky.), Josh Hawley (Mo.), Pete Ricketts (Neb.), Mike Lee (Utah), James Risch (Idaho), John Cornyn (Texas), James Lankford (Okla.), Lindsey Graham (S.C.), Ted Budd (N.C.), Marsha Blackburn (Tenn.), Roger Wicker (Miss.), Jon Husted (Ohio), Steve Daines (Mont.), Tim Scott (S.C.), and Mike Rounds (S.D.). The lawmakers request a response by October 30.

Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Markups

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies hearing "A Review of the Activities and Fiscal Year 2026 Funding Priorities of the Office of the United States Trade Representative;" October 21

Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs markup to consider the nomination of John Bartrum, of Indiana, to be Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health; time TBA; October 22

Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing "Modernizing Health Care: How Shoppable Services Improve Outcomes and Lower Costs;" 3:30 p.m.; October 22

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions hearing "The 340B Program: Examining Its Growth and Impact on Patients;" 10:00 a.m.; October 23

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Recently Introduced Health Legislation

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H.Res.803 — Urging the Director of the Food and Drug Administration to reevaluate the safety of all chemical abortion drugs in light of recent independent studies, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Rose, John W. [Rep.-R-TN-6]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.5733 — To authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services, acting through the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, to award grants to train community mental wellness workers, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Espaillat, Adriano [Rep.-D-NY-13]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.5736 — To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to include penicillin allergy verification and evaluation as part of the initial preventive physical examination under the Medicare program; Sponsor: Griffith, H. Morgan [Rep.-R-VA-9]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means

H.R.5737 — To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to modify data collection requirements for appropriate use criteria for applicable imaging services, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Harshbarger, Diana [Rep.-R-TN-1]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means

S.3006 — A bill to amend the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act to reauthorize the youth prevention and recovery initiative, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Peters, Gary C. [Sen.-D-MI]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

H.Res.805 — Recognizing October 2025 as “American Pharmacists Month” in honor of the contribution of pharmacists to provide safe, accessible, affordable, and beneficial patient care services and products to all residents and protect the public health of our communities; Sponsor: Carter, Earl L. “Buddy” [Rep.-R-GA-1]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.Res.806 — Supporting the recognition of October 2025 as “National Breast Cancer Awareness Month”; Sponsor: Carter, Earl L. “Buddy” [Rep.-R-GA-1]; Committees: House - Oversight and Government Reform

H.R.5747 — To require the Secretary of Health and Human Services, acting through the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, to carry out a program under which the Secretary requires each covered distributor of a highly pathogenic agent to comply with certain logbook requirements, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Costa, Jim [Rep.-D-CA-21]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.5758 — To amend title 38, United States Code, to permit the voluntary transmission of patient contact information to certain religious or faith-based organizations by chaplains employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Self, Keith [Rep.-R-TX-3]; Committees: House - Veterans’ Affairs

S.3011 — A bill to amend the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to exclude coverage of gender-transition procedures for minors and abortion under health plans offered through the American Health Benefits Exchanges, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Hawley, Josh [Sen.-R-MO]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.3014 — A bill to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act with respect to citizen petitions; Sponsor: Shaheen, Jeanne [Sen.-D-NH]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions