



Committee Update

Healthcare Committee

December 12, 2019

Healthcare Committee Meeting Summary

Dear Healthcare Committee Member,

The New England Council Healthcare Committee hosted a conference call with Lizzie O'Hara on December 10th. Ms. O'Hara currently serves as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Congressman Richard E. Neal, Chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means. She serves the Chairman in both the personal and committee offices and covers policy issues that include health; social security; worker and family support; appropriations, and other matters.

With only a few short days before the end of the legislative calendar and amidst reauthorizations and impeachment efforts, the committee remains very grateful for Ms. O'Hara's time and insight. Below is a summary of issues that were discussed on the call:

I. H.R. 3

The first issue address on the call was the current efforts in congress to address lowering drug prices. [H.R. 3](#), also known as the Elijah Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, has been getting much attention in the House and is speculated to be voted on as early as December 12th. The Ways and Means Committee was scheduled to meet hours after the call, so Ms. O'Hara was not able to provide specifics other than a vote is expected on the bill imminently.

When asked about the bill's chances of successful passage in the Senate and approval by the White House, Ms. O'Hara was not able to provide specifics, however, all recent reports indicate the bill will face a significant uphill battle.

II. Surprise medical billing

Another issue gaining attention on Capitol Hill are efforts by the House and Senate to address surprise medical billing. Ms. O'Hara indicated that while the House Energy & Commerce Committee have already submitted a bill to address surprise medical billing, the Ways and Means Committee were also in the process of drafting their own bill.

On Wednesday evening, the House Ways and Means Committee announced released its own [proposal](#) for ending surprise medical bills, potentially complicating efforts by some lawmakers to include legislation in a year-end spending bill. One notable difference in the two bills is that the Ways and Means proposal appears to resolve payment disputes by allowing health care providers and insurers to enter into arbitration. Additionally, Ways and Means officials have indicated they are interested in slowing down the

process, while the leaders of the House Energy and Commerce Committee have been pushing for action before the new year. Surprise medical bills are unpopular among the public, but it remains to be seen how the House and Senate will move forward in their efforts to address the issue.

III. Tax Extenders

Ms. O'Hara indicated that there is still quite a bit of uncertainty when it comes to addressing tax extenders as related to healthcare and other areas. Ms. O'Hara emphasized that there are still issues that need to be addressed among committee members, and pointed out that with impeachment proceedings taking place there is no clear timetable for when extenders such as the medical device tax will be addressed.

Additionally, following Ms. O'Hara's presentation the committee discussed the possibility of sending letters of support on behalf of expiring tax credits. No consensus was reached among members, but I encourage you to contact me if there are specific bills or issues you are interested in seeing the Council support.

IV. USMCA

Unrelated to healthcare, Ms. O'Hara also briefly spoke about the [USMCA agreement](#), which was announced earlier in the day on December 10th. The USMCA has been a top priority for Chairman Neal and while official action had yet to be taken, the announcement of the agreement was very significant.

V. Impeachment

While also not directly tied to healthcare, Ms. O'Hara pointed out that the impeachment efforts in Congress will have a broad impact on all legislation moving forward. Not only is the issue highly political which may result in less willingness to compromise on legislation, but from a logistical stand point impeachment will have a dramatic impact on the legislative schedule and calendar.

VI. Defense Authorization Bill

Ms. O'Hara also briefly touched upon the [defense authorization bill](#) which was ultimately approved by the House on December 11th.