

WASHINGTON WEEKLY REPORT

Bill to Combat Heroin and Opioid Abuse Passes Senate

After two weeks of bipartisan debate on the floor, the Senate passed S. 524, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), to combat the growing epidemic of opioid and heroin abuse. The bill passed with a vote of 94 to 1, marking one of the first pieces of legislation to move this year with widespread bipartisan support. The legislation authorizes but does not appropriate funding for treatment and recovery services, alternatives to prison for nonviolent offenders, law enforcement initiatives and programs to prevent overdose deaths and improper prescriptions. Eligible recipients would include state, local, and tribal governments, educational institutions and nonprofit groups. Some programs would assist specific populations of opioid users such as prisoners, young people and pregnant women. Many of the bill's provisions would direct the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Justice Department to coordinate with each other on grant decisions, support evidence-based practices, provide technical assistance to grant recipients and ensure an equitable geographic distribution of funds.

CARA was also introduced in the House as H.R. 953, but Senators urged the House to move quickly on the Senate-passed version in order to avoid a conference. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), co-author of the bill with Senator Rob Portman (R-OH), said he has not heard a single objection from the House side and is confident the overwhelming Senate vote in favor of the bill will make way for easy House passage later this spring.

Following Senate passage, the White House issued a statement saying it planned to pledge a significant investment to fight opioid abuse following the failed attempt to add federal funding to the legislation. At the same time, HHS Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell announced today that \$94 million in Affordable Care Act funding to 271 health centers in 45 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico would be available to improve and expand the delivery of substance abuse services in health centers. This funding will be used for medication assisted treatment (MAT), which combines behavioral therapy with medications like naloxone, the opioid antagonist drug that can be used during cases of emergency, to treat substance use disorders and will treat rather than incarcerate addicts.

Two-Year FAA Bill

On Thursday, the Chairmen of the House Transportation & Infrastructure and Ways & Means committees introduced legislation that would provide a short-term extension for the authorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), currently set to expire March 31, 2016. The legislation would extend

Upcoming Hearings & Events

March 15, 2016

House Appropriations L-HHS-Edu Subcommittee hearing on Department of Labor Budget at 10:00 am

House Homeland Security Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee hearing on the disaster of cutting Preparedness Grants at 10:00 am

March 16, 2016

Senate HELP Hearing on the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 at 10:00 am

Senate Appropriations T-HUD Subcommittee hearing on the Department of Transportation Budget at 2:30 pm

authority for FAA programs through July 15, but would extend authority to collect aviation taxes through March 31, 2017. The Senate Commerce Committee also introduced separate legislation to reauthorize FAA programs through September 30, 2017, which the Committee will markup on Wednesday, March 16.

The short-term extension comes just two weeks after House leadership decided to shelve the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee passed legislation that authorized funding for the FAA until 2022. The bill drew strong criticism from House Ways & Means Members, House Appropriators, and Senate Republicans and Democrats because it included a provision to separate the air traffic control system from the FAA. House Ways & Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-TX) said that the extension of key revenue provisions would ensure the Airport and Airway Trust Fund continues to serve American travelers.

Upon return from recess next week, House members plan to take up both the one-year extension of excise taxes and fees to fund the agency, as well as the three-month reauthorization of policy. The full Senate will still need to vote on a short-term extension next week before starting its two-week long recess on March 24.

Budget and Appropriations Update

Following House Budget Committee Chairman Tom Price's (R-GA) release of the FY17 House Budget Resolution summary draft, internal disagreement over the discretionary levels among the House Republican Caucus have yet to be quelled. However, Chairman Price continues to work with Committee Republicans to try to sway support for marking up a budget resolution as soon as next Tuesday. Various committees will begin moving separate bills that include significant cuts to entitlement programs as part of Speaker Paul Ryan's (R-WI) final push to unify the Republican Conference behind a budget resolution.

On Thursday, House Ways & Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-TX) released a three-bill package to cut mandatory spending by \$16 to \$17 billion over two years, and \$98 billion within a decade, by targeting overpayments in government programs, including Affordable Care Act subsidies, child tax credits for immigrants working in the United States illegally, and social services grants. Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee Chairman Joe Pitts (R-PA) also released a proposal on Thursday, H.R. 4725, the Common Sense Savings Act, that would achieve \$25 billion in deficit reduction over 10 years. In order to achieve the deficit reduction, the legislation would allow more lottery winnings to be counted as income for the purposes of determining Medicaid eligibility and reduce Medicaid reimbursement rates for prisoners. It would also eliminate an increase in the federal matching rate for the State Children's Health Insurance Program within the Affordable Care Act and limit the ability of states to impose taxes aimed solely at increasing Medicaid payments from the federal government.

Federal Regulatory Update

U.S. Department of Transportation announced the availability of credit assistance for critical infrastructure project through the Transportation Infrastructure Finance & Innovation Act (TIFIA) program.

Federal Highway Administration releases instructions on how states can eliminate old, "orphan earmarks" to use funds for new transportation projections.