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Congress Recesses, Putting Off Unfinished Business Until After Election

AHIP, Washington Update, 10/1/2010

The Senate recessed shortly before midnight on Wednesday and the House recessed a few hours later. Both chambers are scheduled to reconvene on November 15.

Before recessing, Congress finalized a “continuing resolution” (H.R. 3081) that will provide temporary funding for federal programs and agencies from October 1, 2010 through December 3, 2010. Most programs will be funded at fiscal year 2010 levels during this time period. Passage of this measure was necessary because Congress has not approved any of the annual appropriations bills for fiscal year 2011, which begins today.

The agenda for the post-election lame duck session will include completion of the annual appropriations process, an extension of expiring legislative provisions including the Medicare physician payment “fix,” and food safety legislation. Depending on how long Congress stays in session after the election, the agenda also may focus on additional priorities such as an extension of the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, and possibly any recommendations that are agreed to by the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

Both parties also will hold leadership elections, probably in late November or early December, to choose their Senate and House leadership teams for the 112th Congress (2011-2012). The outcome of the November 2 elections will be a significant factor impacting whether the current leaders face challenges.

Senate Resolution Targets Grandfathering Regulation

On September 29, by a vote of 59 to 40, the Senate defeated a procedural motion that would have allowed for consideration of a resolution by Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY) that provided for congressional disapproval of the interim final rule addressing grandfathered health plans under the health reform law. This was a straight party-line vote, with Republicans voting “yes” and Democrats voting “no.”

The Senate floor debate on this resolution included significant discussion about the impact the new health reform law is having on health care costs for small



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businesses and families. The Administration issued a statement that included a veto threat and expressed strong opposition to the Enzi resolution.

HHS Launches Expanded Consumer Web Portal

Today, October 1, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched an expansion of its consumer web portal – located at www.healthcare.gov – which contains information on major medical insurance products in the individual and small group markets along with information on other health coverage options such as Medicaid and high-risk pools.

Building upon the initial version of the web portal that went live on July 1, the web portal expands information on individual health insurance plans by including pricing information, benefits information, and denial rates. More specifically, the portal now includes information for individual health insurance plans on monthly premium estimates; cost-sharing information, including annual deductibles and out-of-pocket limits; major categories of services covered; consumer's share of cost for these services; percent of people in the plan who pay more than the base premium estimate due to their health status; and percent of people denied coverage from a health plan. The expansion announced today does not affect information on small group products, which remains the same as what was previously available on the portal.

A new HHS press release

<http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2010pres/10/20101001b.html> indicates that more than 225 health insurance companies have provided information on more than 4,400 policies to support the web portal. The release includes a quote from Jay Angoff, director of the HHS Office for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight, who states: "We applaud the insurance companies that have provided us this information about their products. Together, we are improving competition in the insurance marketplace."

The American Senior Benefits Association (ASBA) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit association where membership is completely free. ASBA is committed to lifestyle enhancement through benefits, advocacy and education for the over-50 population. ASBA concentrates its efforts on the issues that are of greatest concern to its members. Through its partners and programs, ASBA members receive product and service discounts, as well as other benefits. Current ASBA membership stands at over 500,000 nationally.