



Quality Benefits, Targeted Advocacy & Education for Today's Seniors
1-800-906-ASBA (2722)

Heavy Snow Gives Congress An Early Start on February Recess

AHIP, Washington Update, 2/12/2010

The House and the Senate conducted very little legislative business this week, as two major snow storms disrupted air travel and other forms of transportation throughout the Washington, D.C. area.

The Senate was in session for several hours on both Tuesday and Thursday, casting votes on executive and judicial nominations and approving a few non-controversial bills. The House was in session for approximately 20 minutes on Tuesday. Both chambers will be in recess next week and are scheduled to reconvene on Monday, February 22.

Before the snow hit Washington, the House floor agenda for this week originally had included legislation that would repeal the McCarran-Ferguson Act's antitrust exemption as it relates to health insurers and medical malpractice insurers. This bill, the "Health Insurance Antitrust Enforcement Act of 2010," was announced at a Capitol Hill press conference late last week by Reps. Tom Perriello (D-VA) and Betsy Markey (D-CO).

President Obama Calls for Bipartisan Summit on Health Reform

President Obama announced last weekend that he is inviting Republicans and Democrats to join him at a bipartisan televised health reform summit later this month. The summit will be held on February 25.

In announcing the summit, the President stated: "I want to consult closely with our Republican colleagues... and what I want to do is to ask them to put their ideas on the table." Republican leaders have indicated that they look forward to participating in bipartisan health care talks with the President. House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH) and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) each suggested that the current health reform bills should be scrapped and that the reform process should start over.



Quality Benefits, Targeted Advocacy & Education for Today's Seniors
1-800-906-ASBA (2722)

In addition, Leader Boehner addressed a letter to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel on Monday asking numerous questions about the event. Boehner asked, for example, if the President “has taken off the table the idea of relying solely on Democratic votes and jamming through health care reform by way of reconciliation?” He also asked whether any legislative proposal the President unveils at the summit will be made available at least 72 hours in advance. Other questions focused on the openness and transparency of future health care discussions and whether state lawmakers, CBO officials, CMS actuaries, and special interest groups would be involved in the summit.

President’s Economic Report Addresses Health Reform

On February 11, the White House Council of Economic Advisers released the President’s annual economic report to Congress, reviewing the Administration’s efforts to address challenges in the health care system and others sectors of the U.S. economy. The report’s seventh chapter, entitled “Reforming Health Care,” addresses the current state of the U.S. health care sector, health policy changes that were enacted in 2009, and the comprehensive health reform bills that were approved last year by the House and the Senate.

While discussing the need for insurance market reforms, the report emphasizes that these changes must be linked to incentives for individuals to obtain coverage and for employers to cover their workers. The report states: “While preventing insurance companies from discriminating based on preexisting conditions will help some of the neediest members of our society, in isolation these reforms could increase costs for individuals without preexisting conditions, potentially aggravating adverse selection.” The report further explains that if restrictions on preexisting condition exclusions are adopted without a responsibility to maintain coverage, “high-cost individuals who sign up after falling ill could obtain coverage at low premiums” and “individuals who had contributed toward coverage would be faced with higher costs, potentially driving even more individuals out of coverage.”

Other topics addressed by the report include the role of the proposed health insurance exchange, the economic and health benefits of expanding health insurance coverage, and the economic benefits of slowing the growth rate of health care costs.

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,



Quality Benefits, Targeted Advocacy & Education for Today's Seniors
1-800-906-ASBA (2722)

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.