Congress Seeks to Avoid Disastrous Government Shutdown

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Returning from last week's recess, the House worked on multiple pieces of legislation to address the nation's opioid epidemic as the Senate continued work on advancing the federal appropriations process.

Addressing the Opioid Epidemic

Of the opioid legislation considered, H.R. 4641 would establish a national opioid task force to determine best practices for pain management and prescribing opioids. Another effort, H.R. 5046, the Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Reduction Act of 2016, would direct grants to local law enforcement to enhance collaboration to fight substance abuse, expand treatment and prevention programs, and train first responders. The White House responded to this week's efforts by releasing a Statement of Administration Policy (SAP) supporting the Congressional efforts to address the opioid epidemic. However, the SAP criticizes that the measures fall short of meeting the needs of the American people, saying "Every day that passes without Congressional action to support the treatment needs of those suffering from opioid use disorder is a missed opportunity to help the many communities facing the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic." While these efforts do not represent the breadth of policy interventions Congress could implement to fight the epidemic, AIDS United is encouraged by the continued attention to the opioid epidemic as well as the focus on increasing access to drugs that counter addiction.

Federal Appropriations

With legislative days rapidly dwindling as Congress approaches its July recess, Members of Congress seek to avoid the disastrous government shutdown showdown we experienced in 2013. Even the threat of a shutdown could have disastrous impact for the majority party right before the November elections.

To that end, House and Senate members took steps to make progress on federal appropriations. On Tuesday the House Appropriations Committee released the subcommittee draft of the fiscal year (FY) 2017 Defense Appropriations bill. The legislation funds critical national security needs, including military operations and readiness programs, as well as health and quality-of-life programs for service members and their families, including $8 million for HIV prevention education within the military.

The Senate considered the Energy and Water Appropriations bill which has grown uncharacteristically contentious because of an amendment added by Senator Tom Cotton. The amendment would prevent the U.S. from purchasing heavy water from Iran and serves as a tool for Senate Republicans to express discontent with President Obama's nuclear deal with Iran. However, the amendment failed to get the 60 votes needed to advance it within the final Energy and Water appropriations bill. The Senate then passed its $37.5 billion fiscal 2017 energy and water development appropriations bill Thursday in a 90-8 vote.

With the Energy and Water bill out of the way, the Senate will now proceed with other appropriations measures. One of the next bills expected to be brought to the full Senate is the Transportation-HUD bill, which includes funding for the HOPWA program. The Agriculture-Food and Drug Administration spending bill will be marked up in subcommittee on Tuesday, May 17th.

Moving forward the in the House, next Tuesday, the Appropriations Committee is scheduled to mark up the FY 2017 Defense Appropriations bill and the FY 2017 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill.

AIDS United continues to prioritize monitoring and influencing the appropriations process to ensure meaningful funding levels for domestic HIV programs. For questions, please reach out to Director of Government Affairs, Carl Baloney at cbaloney@aidsunited.org.

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