Congressional Budget Upheaval Par for the Course

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The House returned to session this week joining the Senate following a week of recess in order to consider a bevy of matters ranging from legislation to declare the egregious actions by ISIS as genocide, to regulating broadband, and the federal budget. The latter issue has broad implications across policy and program sectors, with crucial health and safety-net programs facing large cuts.

The multipronged effort by conservative House Members to enact severe cuts spans multiple committees of jurisdiction. For its part, the House Energy and Commerce Committee (E&C) marked up legislation, H.R. 4725 to create $30 billion in program cuts to entitlement spending. Conservatives seek to make the cuts a condition for supporting a budget resolution in line with the $1.07 trillion budget deal made last year. H.R. 4725 would cut $25 billion over 10 years and would jeopardize health care services for low-income people including many people living with HIV, by shifting Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) costs to states. It also eliminates some of the only prevention funding for public health created through the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the Prevention and Public Health Fund. In AIDS United's view, these additional cuts are egregious and duplicative, as last year's Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) was paid for by offsets negotiated in that agreement.

The attacks on entitlement programs don't stop in E&C Committee. In addition to cuts deliberated there, House Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady (R-TX) announced a trio of bills resurrected from 2012 as sweeteners for "Freedom Caucus" hawks who don't want to stick to the BBA deal. The Brady Package would cut the deficit by $16.5 billion over two years and $98 billion over 10 years, far below historical spending levels. Brady justified the steep cuts saying, "The American people want Congress to fight fraud and cut wasteful spending—and that's what these bills do."

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