What the Next Congress Could Mean for People Living With HIV

Keep your eyes on the 340B Drug Discount program and funding for the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program.

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Over the next several weeks, the larger media narrative around the midterm shake-up in Congress will likely revolve around House Democrats and their approach to the plethora of scandals and controversies that surround President Trump. However, it is all but inevitable that the vast majority of this coverage will focus on issues that do not directly impact people living with or affected by HIV. And, while issues like President Trump's tax returns and the Mueller investigation are critically important to ensuring the wellbeing of the American political system, we at AIDS United wanted to provide a more tailored preview of the ways in which this new Congress will impact health care, HIV funding, drug pricing, and a host of other issues that are the enduring focus of the HIV advocacy community.

Congressional and Committee-Level Leadership

Despite being public enemy number one among Republicans this campaign season and even being thrown to the proverbial lions by several House Democrats in tight races this year, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA-12) is poised to once again be the Speaker of the House. However, while the likelihood of Pelosi's re-election as Speaker after an 8-year hiatus will be sure to garner headlines, the selection of a handful of House Committee heads could be more impactful for the HIV advocacy community. Rep. Frank Pallone (NJ-6) is expected to chair the House Energy & Commerce Committee, where he will oversee the most expansive set of health care issues in the House, including the 340B Drug Discount program, which allows some health centers, including Ryan White clinics, to use savings from pharmaceutical discounts to support their programs. 340B will continue to be a hot button issue, but much of the harmful legislation that was proposed last Congress will be dead on arrival in a Democratic House.

Rep. Nita Lowey (NY-17) will likely be named House Appropriations Chair, becoming the first woman to do so in the committee's 150-year history, while Rep. Rosa DeLauro (CT-3) is set to chair the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Subcommittee; both positions have significant sway in setting funding levels for federal agencies, and particularly those that support the Ryan White Program and other HIV care and treatment. Rep. Elijah Cummings (MD-7) will probably chair the House Oversight Committee and will be responsible for handling the

larger-scale issues of our democracy mentioned above.

The Affordable Care Act Finds Relative Safety

After a tumultuous 115th Congress that saw the GOP try everything in their power to torpedo the Affordable Care Act, the threat of ACA repeal will be nonexistent from Congress over the next 2 years thanks to the new Democratic House majority. However, the ACA's immunity from attack does not extend to the Trump administration itself, a fact that is not lost on Democratic House leadership. We will likely see a number of efforts from House Democrats to expose the Trump administration's attempted sabotage of the ACA and implement policies that will prevent further sabotage from taking place.

Standing Up for Immigrants and Communities of Color

During his first 2 years in office, it has been exceedingly difficult for Democrats in Congress to put meaningful checks on President Trump's repeated attacks on and abuses of immigrant populations and communities of color. Hopefully, that will change in the 116th Congress as Democrats now have the power to call for investigations into the Trump administration's discriminatory and harmful actions. In the coming months, expect to see House Democrats launch investigations into both the Trump administration's systemic abuse and incarceration of immigrant families and their unacceptable response to the devastation of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

Check back regularly to AIDS United's Policy Update for the latest Congressional and administrative actions affecting HIV care, treatment, and prevention in the United States.

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