



The College on Problems of Drug Dependence

CPDD April 2017 Newsletter Prepared by Van Scoyoc Associates

FISCAL 2018 BUDGET

On April 26, House appropriators filed a one-week continuing resolution to fund the government through May 5 and buy more time for negotiators to reach a final spending deal for the remainder of the current fiscal year. It is being reported that an omnibus FY17 spending package could be voted on in the House as soon as Friday, though there is still no final agreement or text. The CR maintains funding levels and policy provisions under the current continuing resolution, which was set to expire at midnight tomorrow. [More.](#)

OPIOID PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION

President Trump signed an [executive order](#) on March 29th establishing a commission to address the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic. The Commission will be headed by New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. While there was some praise for the Administration for addressing the issue, some advocates were critical of the plan, saying that another commission is duplicative of the work already done by the Surgeon General last year. Read more [here](#).

DRUG CZAR NOMINATION

Trump is planning to nominate Rep. Tom Marino (R-PA) to lead the Office of National Drug Control Policy. He would succeed Rich Baum, who Trump last month tapped to be the acting White House "drug czar." Marino sits on the House Judiciary Committee, which worked on legislation to address the opioid epidemic last year. He authored two bills on the topic that President Barack Obama signed into law, including a controversial measure increasing coordination between prescription drug distributors and the Drug Enforcement Agency. Read more [here](#) from CBS News.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

The Trump administration [announced](#) it will nominate Elinore McCance-Katz for the first ever HHS assistant secretary for mental health and substance. She previously served as the chief medical officer at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. She now serves in the same role at Rhode Island's behavioral health department. The new position, which was created by last year's 21st Century Cures Act, will oversee SAMHSA and coordinate the nation's mental health and substance abuse treatment programs at other agencies throughout the federal government.

McCAIN-GILLIBRAND BILL TARGETS OPIOID PRESCRIPTIONS

Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced legislation on April 13th that would prevent doctors from initially prescribing more than a seven-day supply of opioids for acute pain. Providers and clinicians would have to certify that they're following the seven-day

rule as part of their DEA registration allowing them to prescribe opioids and other controlled substances. Read the full details [here](#).

FDA COMMISSIONER NOMINEE

Scott Gottlieb, President Trump's choice for commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), was vetted by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) on April 5th. Gottlieb served as FDA's deputy commissioner for medical and scientific affairs under President George W. Bush. At the hearing, [Democrats expressed concern](#) about alleged conflicts of interest with the private sector. A number of committee members asked questions about the opioid epidemic during the hearing as well. Dr. Gottlieb said the opioid crisis is a public health emergency on level of Ebola and Zika. To watch the full hearing, [click here](#). The Senate HELP Committee voted on Scott Gottlieb's nomination on April 27th and he is expected to be confirmed by the Senate.

ACA REPEAL AND REPLACE EFFORTS

There has been a renewed push in the House to repeal and replace the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA). The reforms under discussion include allowing states to apply for a waiver to opt out of the Essential Health Benefit (EHB) and the community rating requirements. However, finding common ground between conservatives and moderates remains difficult, and if the House manages to push through a repeal, hurdles await in the Senate. Read more [here](#).

FISCAL 2018 PROPOSED NIH BUDGET

On March 16th, the President's FY 2018 preliminary [budget blueprint](#), "America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again," was released. A full budget is not expected until late May. The proposal would increase defense spending by \$54 billion and offset that by reducing funds from more than 18 other agencies. For the Department of Health and Human Services, the Trump Administration proposed nearly an 18 percent decrease. That sum excludes funding for mandatory programs like Medicare and Medicaid, but includes additional funds for program integrity and implementing the 21st Century CURES Act. For NIH, the Administration is proposing to cut the agency by \$5.8 billion, about 19 percent of its current \$30.3 billion discretionary budget. The plan also includes a "major reorganization" of NIH's 27 institutes and centers, however, it is unclear what kind of reorganization the administration envisions. The budget includes a request for \$500 million to address the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic; this \$500 million is the second half of the \$1 billion included in the 21st Century Cures Act at the end of last year. Many of President Trump's budget proposals have run into strong resistance from lawmakers on Capitol Hill, including Republicans. Read more [here](#).

OPIOID ABUSE CRISIS HEARING

On April 5th, the House Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee held a hearing entitled, "Federal Response to the Opioid Abuse Crisis." Topics addressed during the hearing included the availability of addiction treatment, prescriber education, Naloxone, and coverage of addiction treatment under the Affordable Care Act. To watch the full hearing [click here](#).

ENERGY AND COMMERCE FENTANYL HEARING

On March 21st the House Energy and Commerce Committee Oversight Subcommittee held a hearing entitled, “Fentanyl: The Next Wave of the Opioid Crisis.” The witnesses, who all represented federal agencies, testified about the need for coordinated efforts to address the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic. Full witness testimony is available [here](#).

PRICE URGES NEW APPROACHES IN OPIOID BATTLE

HHS Secretary Tom Price is pushing for a broader review of the agency's approach to opioids, and urging doctors to rethink how they manage patients' pain. Price, in a speech at the National Rx Drug Abuse and Heroin Summit, announced \$485 million in new HHS funding for prevention and treatment grants targeted at opioid addiction — money made available through the 21st Century Cures Act. Price, according to [prepared remarks](#), said the country must "avoid creating dependence in the first place." HHS will review its approach to opioids, including its payment policies and prescribing guidelines "to ensure that we are not pushing doctors toward quick fixes that risk lives," Price said. He praised work already done by CDC, CMS, private insurance and medical educators to change this trend, but said more needs to be done.

FENTANYL MAY BE ADDED TO FEDERAL DRUG TESTING SCREENS

In response to the suspected overdose death of a Spirit Airlines pilot, HHS Secretary Tom Price said adding Fentanyl to federal drug testing screens is one of the things that can be raised before the White House opioids commission. [More](#)

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