

Jan. 10, 2019: Advocacy spotlight on Issues to watch in the 116th Congress

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Under the shadow of a partial government shutdown, the 116th Congress convened on Jan. 3. The House is now under the leadership of Democrats and Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). In the Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), finds himself with a slightly larger Republican majority than the one he enjoyed over the previous two years. Recent polling has continued to demonstrate that there are a handful of health care issues at the top of the minds of many voters and, consequently, their representatives in Congress. Among them are health care costs—particularly the cost of health insurance and prescription drugs.

Democrats in the House have already acted to preserve the ACA by taking steps to intervene in ongoing litigation (*Texas v. Azar*) in which a Federal District Court in Texas recently ruled the ACA was unconstitutional.

On the issue of prescription drug prices, there are some areas where Republicans and Democrats may find common ground. The new Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Charles Grassley (R-IA), expressed in a recent Senate floor speech a strong interest in stopping the exploitation of regulatory loopholes by industry which unfairly extends monopolies over drugs, reducing competition. Other areas that will likely see activity in the new Congress include a close examination of drivers of health care costs overall, as well as the issue of unanticipated medical bills from out-of-network physicians and other providers.

Despite the intense interest on these and other concerns in the health care sphere, the reality of a politically divided Congress will make enactment of significant new legislation a challenge.

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