



Welcome to *Washington Update*, the weekly e-newsletter on the latest health care happenings in the nation's capital that affect APG's members.

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Confirmation Vote For Robert F. Kennedy Jr. May Come Next Week Following This Week's Grilling In The Senate

Vaccine skepticism and confusion about government health programs dominated nomination hearings this week for Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the Trump administration's nominee to lead the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Although Democrats took the lead on tough questioning, Kennedy also appeared to face doubts from some Republicans in hearings before both the [Senate Finance](#) and the [Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions](#) (HELP) Committees.

Kennedy walked back some of his earlier anti-vaccine statements, saying in his opening [statement](#) to the Finance panel hearing that all of his children had been vaccinated and that he believed "vaccines have a critical role in health care." But under questioning, he declined to retreat from the false view that vaccines cause autism. He also spoke at

length about his concerns about chronic disease, high health care costs, and the poor health of many Americans.

HELP Committee chair Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), a physician, pressed Kennedy on both vaccines and how the nominee would reduce health care costs. Kennedy appeared to confuse the Medicare and Medicaid programs, stating erroneously that Medicaid is fully paid for by the federal government, that the program carries “high premiums,” and that Medicare Advantage costs enrollees more than traditional Medicare. On the plus side for APG members, he did describe value-based care and “transparency, accountability, [and] access” as the “ultimate goal.”

Votes are expected next week to move Kennedy’s nomination forward, possibly to a final confirmation vote. It is unclear whether Cassidy and several other Republican senators who have expressed doubts about his candidacy will ultimately vote to confirm him.



Trump Administration's Second Week Brings More Upheaval Across Government, With Uncertain Implications For Health Care

A near devastating flip-flop on cutting off federal funding and a bid to voluntarily terminate millions of federal workers bred chaos and confusion across the government this week. Although the Trump administration stepped back from the brink on the former, the latter bid to downsize the federal workforce could hold uncertain implications for the disposition of health programs government wide.

The drama began when the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a [memo](#) on Monday ordering the temporary freeze of “all federal financial assistance,” further elaborating that the aid to individuals would not be affected. All the same, Medicaid funding portals in all 50 states had soon stopped working, and the [2,600 federal programs](#) said to be under review included Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Medicare prescription drug coverage, and veteran’s services. A Washington, DC federal court blocked the freeze on Tuesday, and after a broad backlash, the White House rescinded the order Wednesday afternoon.

Also this week, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced a plan offering nearly all federal government employees a “[deferred resignation](#)” plan if they chose to voluntarily resign. Congressional Democrats and federal worker union representatives questioned the administration’s legal authority to offer buyout funds and warned workers not to accept the offer. Legal challenges to the arrangement are likely.

APG will monitor events for signs that health care programs of interest to members could be adversely affected by large-scale departures of knowledgeable federal staff.



House Republicans Grapple With Size And Scope Of Massive Legislative Package And Needed "Pay-Fors"

Despite a commitment to using the [budget reconciliation](#) process to pass a huge package of border security, energy measures, and tax cuts, House Republicans are still debating on whether it will take one or two bills, as well as how to pay for it without adding massively to federal budget deficits.

At their Florida retreat this week, the House Freedom caucus pressed for two bills even as Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) favored one. Potential costs of the package are skyrocketing as President Trump insists on eliminating income taxes on tips, overtime, and Social Security benefits, and cutting the corporate tax rate from 21 percent to 15 percent. Centrist Republicans in vulnerable swing districts are fearful about many of the potential cuts identified as “pay-fors” for tax cuts, such as a huge [shift of Medicaid costs](#) to states and [reductions](#) in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Plan (SNAP) benefits.

With a House margin of 217 Republicans to 215 Democrats, internal divisions such as these could doom legislation or force big changes. Meanwhile, a separate March 14 deadline looms for passing a fiscal 2025 appropriations bill or yet another continuing resolution of fiscal 2024 spending.



In Case You Missed It

- APG’s [comment letter](#) to CMS on contract year 2026 policy and technical Changes to the Medicare Advantage (MA) program focused on such issues as requirements on MA brokers that they clarify for enrollees issues in obtaining Medigap coverage if they exit MA.
- The Trump administration [signaled](#) that it would support the Medicare Drug Price Negotiation Program while seeking greater “transparency” in the forthcoming second cycle of negotiations.

- CMS [backtracked](#) on its recent appeal of a federal judge's decision in UnitedHealthcare's lawsuit over its MA Star Ratings, newly withdrawing its notice of appeal.



APG Announcements And Offerings

- APG will host a members-only **Focus Group meeting** on **Tuesday, February 4, 12:00-1:00 pm ET**, to solicit feedback about the MA 2026 Advance Notice. MA Coalition members should watch for an email with a registration link.
- APG will host an **Emerging Trends in Health Care Webinar** on **Wednesday, February 12, 2:00 pm – 2:45 pm ET**, with guest [Seema Verma](#), Executive Vice President and General Manager of Oracle Health and Life Sciences, and former administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Register for the webinar [here](#).
- The next APG Hosted Webinar, "**Guardant Shield – The Revolutionary Liquid Biopsy for Colorectal Cancer Screening**," will take place on **Monday, March 24, 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm ET**. The webinar will be presented by Guardant. Register [here](#).
- Registration is now open for the [APG Spring Conference 2025](#) — **Kickstarting Accountable Care: Innovations for an Urgent Future, May 14-16, in San Diego, CA**. APG Members who register by February 14 save \$300 with the Super Early Bird rate. APG Partners and non-members save up to \$200 with regular Early Bird registration that ends March 14. Groups of 5 or more that register together receive an additional \$50 savings per registrant. **New this year: bundle your savings!** All APG Spring Conference 2025 registrants will have an opportunity to register for the APG Fall Conference 2025 at the lowest price of the year, with discounts up to \$400. Simply follow the link on your Spring Conference confirmation e-mail to register for Fall now!
- Sponsorship is open for the **APG Spring Conference 2025**, May 14-16, in San Diego. Visit our [Spring Conference 2025 sponsor website](#) and reserve your space today!
- Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts? [Join APG Advocates today](#).

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