



BOS Washington Update



Wednesday, April 2, 2014

This is the way SGR repeal ends, not with a bang but a whimper. The Senate voted on March 31st to pass the House's year-long SGR patch, dealing a potentially fatal blow to SGR repeal before the end of the year. The President signed the bill last night. While Congress could eventually come together on a repeal bill before the current version expires on December 31st, hopes remain dim that both parties and both houses can come to an agreement on how to pay for such a bill.

Patchwork. The bill, HR 4302, would patch the SGR formula for twelve months, providing a 0.5% update through December 31, 2014 and a 0% update from January 1, 2015 through March 31, 2015. This came after a truly bizarre scene unfolded in the House, whereby leaders recessed the House, gaveled it back into session, passed the bill on a voice vote (meaning no roll call taken), and then went back into recess. On a 64-35 vote, the Senate cleared the House-passed 13-month last night, sending the measure to the White House for signature. The President signed the bill yesterday evening. ([The Hill](#))

Glass Half Full. On the plus side, the bill does delay ICD-10 implementation until at least October 1, 2015. With cost estimates for ICD-10 reaching into the millions for some practices, the year-long reprieve is welcome news for a number of practices struggling to get ready for what was an October 1, 2014 deadline. ([Healthcare IT News](#))

Here Comes the Sunshine Act. In February, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released the final rule of the Physician Payment Sunshine Act, which requires applicable manufacturers of drugs, devices, biologics or medical supplies to disclose financial relationships, payments, and other transfers of value to physicians and teaching hospitals. Data collection officially begins August 1, 2013 and the first report, which will include data from August 1 to December 31, 2013, is due to CMS by March 31, 2014. All data submission will be conducted through a web interface, and the data from this report period will be made public by September 30, 2014. [Key revisions to the law can be viewed here](#), courtesy of the American Bar Association.

More ACA Reforms. In late March, Last Thursday, a group of centrist Senate Democrats called for significant changes to the Affordable Care Act, an issue weighing on many Democrats up for re-election this year. Sens. Mark Warner (D-VA), Mark Begich (D-AK), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) and Joe Manchin (D-WV), as well as Sen. Angus King (I-ME) introduced a set of principles and legislation aimed at strengthening the health law. Their proposals include adding high-deductible "copper plan" featuring lower premiums and higher out-of-pocket costs than the existing marketplace options of "bronze," "silver" and "gold" options. ([Politico Magazine](#))

White House Hits 7 Million ACA Target. More than 7 million people signed up for health insurance through Affordable Care Act exchanges through the March 31st deadline, White House press secretary Jay Carney announced. A total of 7,041,000 people signed up, Carney said, and that number doesn't include enrollment surges that took place in the 14 states running their own insurance marketplaces. In a Rose Garden ceremony on April 1, President Obama addressed the milestone.

"No, the Affordable Care Act hasn't fixed our long broken health care system, but this law has made our broken system a lot better," said President Obama. "Under this law, the share of Americans with insurance is up, and the growth of health care costs is down." ([Whitehouse.gov](#))

GOP Reaction. Republicans were understandably less enthused about the ACA milestone. “House Speaker John Boehner repeated his call for a conservative replacement to the Affordable Care Act on Wednesday, emphasizing that the Republican Party is one of alternatives, not opposition. ‘Our job is to show the American people we have better solutions,’ said Boehner. ‘We’re working to build a consensus to do that, and when we have something to talk about, we’ll show you.’” ([Time](#))

Jindalcare? Earlier today, Louisiana Governor and potential Republican presidential candidate Bobby Jindal released his proposed alternative to the Affordable Care Act. The Jindal plan proposes “a \$100 billion block grant to the states with a mandate that they provide coverage for pre-existing conditions, lower costs and improve health outcomes... Many of the policy recommendations are familiar Republican proposals. Among them: lawsuit reform, tax deductions both for policies bought by employers and individuals, and expansion of health savings accounts that people can use to pay for health insurance and health care. It would also allow health plans to offer tax-free incentives to people who participate in wellness plans, such as exercise and diet. ([NOLA.com/Times-Picayune](#))

And Finally...

BOS Washington Update comes to you from Washington, DC, but written mostly by a Boston ex-pat. It is thus at the intersection of Boston and Washington that we bring you this scene from the White House yesterday, as the World Champion Boston Red Sox visited President Obama at the White House:

