



Legislative Alert

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Hints of Bipartisan Cooperation on Health Issues in the Energy & Commerce Committee

- In first days of 113th Congress, the House approved bipartisan legislation, hinting at possible increased cooperation on health care issues
- Exchange between Energy & Commerce Committee leaders highlights increased likelihood of a bill becoming law if it receives support from both parties
- Implementation of contentious ACA provisions late in the year could change this early dynamic

In its first official meeting of the new Congress, the House Energy & Commerce Committee passed what Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI) described as “five commonsense and bipartisan bills.” Three of the bills focus on health care issues.

[The Children’s Hospital GME Support Reauthorization Act](#) offers extended support of graduate medical education programs in children’s hospitals for five years. Over 40% of pediatricians and pediatric specialists are trained through the CHGME program. The bill was authored by Health Subcommittee Chairman Joe Pitts (R-PA) and Ranking Member Frank Pallone (D-NJ).

[The National Pediatric Research Network Act](#), which was authored by Representatives Lois Capps (D-CA) and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), would allow the National Institutes of Health to fund institution networks that cooperate to research conditions and diseases affecting children.

[The Veteran Emergency Medical Technician Support Act](#) would streamline the state-licensing process and make it easier for veterans who already have military emergency medical technician (EMT) training to become EMTs in the civilian workforce. The bill was authored by Representatives Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) and Lois Capps (D-CA).

Also on January 22, the full House approved, by a vote of 395 to 29, the bipartisan [Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Reauthorization Act of 2013](#), which strengthens countermeasures to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear attacks.

In anticipation of the 113th Congress, House Energy & Commerce Committee Ranking Member Henry Waxman (D-CA) [sent a memo](#) to Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI) that addressed the legislative successes of the committee in the 112th Congress.

In his memo to Upton, Waxman stressed the need to focus on bipartisan legislation. During the 112th Congress, 31 bills were moved from the committee or taken directly to the House floor without support of a majority of the committee's Democrats. Just two of these 31 bills were passed, a success rate of 6%. Support from a majority of Democrats on the committee had a powerful impact in the 112th Congress, according to Mr. Waxman. Thirty-three bills moved to the House floor with the support of a majority of Energy and Commerce Democrats. These bills had a much higher rate of passage; 18 of the 33 bipartisan bills became law, a success rate of 55%.

In an effort to deflect accusations from Democrats of being a “do-nothing” Congress, Republican committee members may be increasingly willing to work with Democratic colleagues on certain initiatives while straying from more-partisan bills that have little chance of passing the House, much less the Democratically-controlled Senate. A strategy that promotes an increased rate of bill passage could prove beneficial to all members of the committee, who will then be able to point to greater legislative success and influence among constituents.

With the implementation of the ACA, including its most contentious provisions, in full swing in 2013, along with health care being tied to the debt/deficit debate, it is unlikely that health care will be a topic that stays above the partisan fray for the full year. However, the first couple of weeks of the 113th Congress do indicate that smaller, more targeted initiatives capable of generating bipartisan support could move more quickly than in the 112th Congress, when the ACA and presidential politics seized the debate.

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