



House Republicans Outline Novel Health Reform Defunding Tactic

By Julian Pecquet - 03/07/11

Energy and Commerce Committee Republicans identified on Monday five provisions of the healthcare reform law that they want to subject to annual appropriations so they can defund them.

Health subcommittee Chair Joe Pitts (R-Pa.) announced last week that he'd seek to transform the law's mandatory spending into discretionary spending, which is in the hands of congressional appropriators. An internal memo obtained by The Hill says Pitts' subcommittee will hold a hearing Wednesday on the matter, and outlines five specific programs that Republicans want to make discretionary.

The healthcare law "was unusual in the sense that it provided mandatory spending for numerous newly created or established programs that would be normally considered discretionary in nature," asserts the memo. "This funding process weakens Congressional oversight by bypassing the annual appropriations process where Congress is forced to weigh the relative value of discretionary programs."

The five provisions identified are:

- Grants for state-based health insurance exchanges;
- A \$17.75 billion (over 10 years) Prevention and Public Health Fund;
- A \$200 million construction and capital cost fund for school-based health centers;
- State grants for sexual education and other "personal responsibility education" for adolescents (\$75 million per year, 2010 through 2014); and
- Grants to establish or expand primary care residency programs in teaching health centers (\$230 million, 2011-2015).

The majority's proposed witnesses are well-known conservatives: Former Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.), now a distinguished fellow at the Heritage Foundation; and **John Goodman**, the president and CEO of the **National Center for Policy Analysis**. Additional witnesses may be added.