



SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE IN THE PRACTICE OF NEUROLOGY

AAN
NEWS & NOTES

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From the President

The Alabama Academy of Neurology is still in the first-year phase of reorganizing and revitalizing our society. As you know, the Medical Association began managing our specialty society last June. The new management relationship between the Alabama Academy of Neurology and the Medical Association will bring quality CME programs, membership recruitment, communications, board management and legislative support to our members.

We hope that you will join your colleagues across the state and support the Alabama Academy of Neurology. We are encouraged that this new partnership will bring more members and allow us to have a stronger voice in matters that affect our profession while allowing us to care for our patients. Dues statements for 2017 were mailed mid-February. You may also download a statement from our website at www.alneurology.com/join-aan. We are working with the American Academy of Neurology to have your state dues included with your national dues through their website. We hope to have that ready by the 2018 dues year to make joining more convenient.

In previous years, the Alabama Academy of Neurology held two meetings each year at USA and UAB. Plans are already in progress to hold an annual meeting on August 12, 2017, in Montgomery, at the Embassy Suites Hotel. It is our hope that holding the meeting in a central location, as well as keeping it at a low cost, will help bolster attendance and allow for the members across the state to better network with one another. We are already working to obtain top notch speakers from USA, UAB, American Academy of Neurology and other entities.

Talk to your colleagues and encourage them to join and attend our meeting on August 12 in Montgomery. Information can also be found on our website at www.alneurology.com/annual-conference.

Sincerely,

Amit Arora MD
 President
 Alabama Academy of Neurology

Congress ponders Obamacare strategies

Mike Amery, Esq., AAN Senior Legislative Counsel

Republicans ran election campaigns focusing on the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as "Obamacare" in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. They eventually gained all three legislative legs of government with the House in 2010, the Senate in 2014, and then the presidency in 2016. Now they are working at fulfilling their pledge.

The goal of this *Capitol Hill Report* is not to discuss the merits of potential changes, but rather, to examine the process that Republicans will try to use to repeal and replace and the defenses that Democrats might be able to employ in opposition.

The main defense Democrats have is that controversial legislation almost always needs a 60-vote supermajority to pass through the Senate. Because Republicans only control 52 votes in the Senate, they cannot outright repeal and replace with an up or down vote. Last week, I had the opportunity to speak with both Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) about their plans. Recognizing the inherent difficulty in getting to 60 votes in the Senate, Ryan and McCarthy plan to use

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Our Annual Meeting for 2017 is taking shape and we expect to publish the agenda soon. The meeting will offer five hours of instruction and will feature topics such as How to be Successful in the New World of Quality Measurement and Payment Metrics. We will also hear an update from the American Academy of Neurology.

The AAN Board chose to have the meeting in central Alabama to provide convenience for attendees traveling from all parts of the state. We will meet at the Embassy Suites, 300 Tallapoosa St, Montgomery, AL 36104. Situated in the heart of historic downtown Montgomery, the Embassy Suites is close to a variety of national historic landmarks. The Union Station Train shed is located next door with many other attractions and restaurants within walking distance.

Look for meeting details coming soon to www.alneurology.com.

Reserve a room at the **Embassy Suites Montgomery** by calling (334) 269-5055 with Group Code AAN or reserve online at www.embassysuites.com. Rates begin at \$129. Note: \$10 per day self parking fee applies. The room block expires July 21.

Help us spread the word about AAN's 2017 Conference

Vendor participation is vital to the success our conferences. Please use the business cards included with your February dues statement to invite vendors to join us, or contact Jennifer Hayes at (334) 954-2500 or jhayes@alamedical.org.

Obamacare strategies continued

three separate methods for repealing and replacing the ACA. They are calling the strategy "three buckets."

Bucket #1 - Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a legislative process that requires only a majority vote in the Senate, but it is restricted to proposals that change a budget deficit or surplus. Republicans passed a budget last month. This opened the door to make changes to the ACA, but only on those provisions that impact the budget. This includes sections such as the individual mandate, the medical device tax, and the Cadillac tax. This part should be easy. However, eliminating some of these provisions will likely be very expensive, which requires spending cuts in other areas or increased revenues, which would mean the unlikely prospect of raising taxes.

Bucket #2 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

The legislation creating the ACA passed by Democrats in 2010 runs 2,700 pages. The word "secretary" appears in the ACA more than 3,000 times. This means that the secretary of HHS is given wide discretion on interpreting and implementing many of the ACA's

provisions. A perfect example of this was the ACA's "Medicaid bump" which allowed the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), a division of HHS, to expand the bonus to all internal medicine subspecialties, but not neurology, psychiatry, or OB/GYNs.

President Trump's nominee for HHS secretary is Rep. Tom Price, MD, (R-GA) who is a former orthopaedic surgeon. Assuming he takes the reigns at HHS, his first priority is likely to begin unraveling Obamacare through the 3,000 times his office is mentioned in the ACA.

Bucket #3 - Legislation

Anything that doesn't impact the budget and cannot be affected by the HHS secretary will have to pass both houses of Congress and will be subject to the Senate's 60-vote requirement. This includes popular programs like requiring insurance to cover pre-existing conditions and allowing children to remain on their parent's health insurance until age 26, as well as more controversial issues like insurance coverage mandates. This will require compromise and may be very difficult.

The AAN has heard from many members concerned about how any repeal and replace plans might impact their patients and all Americans. In response, the AAN's Government Relations Committee has drafted principles for AAN positions. **These principles include important AAN priorities such as ensuring appropriate health care coverage for all Americans, appropriately valuing the cognitive care that neurologists provide, and reducing regulatory burdens on all physicians.** The AAN Board of Directors is considering the principles now and I hope to write about the specifics in the next issue of Capitol Hill Report.

Both Speaker Ryan and Majority Leader McCarthy stressed to me that they believe Obamacare has serious structural flaws and will collapse without changes. They say their goal is not to cause people to lose coverage, it is to create structural integrity. They are committed to "getting it right." As they move forward, the AAN will be ready to weigh on the priorities of AAN members and the patients they serve.

“Repeal and Replace” Obamacare: How Will All of This Sort Itself Out?

A Health Care Reform Blog – Bob Laszewski’s (Jan. 17) review of the latest developments in federal health policy, health care reform, and marketplace activities in the health care financing business.

Will the Republicans Follow Through on Their Promise to Repeal Obamacare?

Yes.

You have probably been reading press stories that bring into question whether or not Republicans will actually keep their campaign promise to “repeal” the Affordable Care Act (ACA). In fact, there is much discussion going on among Congressional Republicans about repealing key funding elements of the ACA as part of a budget process prior to having a replacement ready to pass the Congress.

But, they will defund the core elements of Obamacare sooner rather than later on their way to replacement. They have to. Repealing Obamacare as a first priority was a core campaign promise. If Congressional Republicans and President Trump fail to do this they will suffer a precipitous drop in credibility with their base.

Do Republicans Have a Replacement Plan?

Yes – at least a pretty specific outline for what they would do.

Speaker Paul Ryan’s “Better Way” outline, last year’s very similar Burr, Hatch, Upton bill, and a number of other similar Republican proposals lay out a clear path for a preferred Republican alternative. Donald Trump said this weekend that his plan, likely very similar to these, will be released once his new Secretary of HHS is confirmed.

These plans share the same key elements but have not yet been put in legislative form or been “scored.” Just exactly what the new subsidy/tax credit scheme would look like and how it would impact consumers compared to what we now have in Obamacare is the biggest unknown.

The problem isn’t that they don’t have a plan. The problem is that Republicans don’t have a plan that will garner the required 60 votes in the U.S. Senate to become law. With 52 Republicans, they will need at least eight Democrats to

join them. There simply are not the eight Democrats, or a guarantee that all 52 Republicans can be counted on, to ensure something like the general Republican replacement outline can become law.

Does This Mean That Republicans Will Retreat on Repeal Until Such Time as They Can Secure the Needed Democratic Support?

No.

First, Republicans are now in so deep on the repeal promise they can’t retreat and maintain credibility with their Republican/Trump base.

Second, the reality is that Washington, DC, wouldn’t be able to find a bipartisan route to get past gridlock on such a complex and politically charged issue as Obamacare without facing hard deadlines for replacement.

Those that argue that Republicans should first have the replacement plan in place before proceeding make the assumption that without the imperative repeal/defund would create the two sides would be able to come to a bipartisan solution. In this Washington, DC? I just don’t see that happening.

But Hasn’t the Republican “Repeal and Replace” Strategy Now Put Them on the Defensive?

Yes.

Republicans are clearly losing the messaging battle with Democrats now on the offensive. A lack of a clear message about replacement creates a huge information gap that is easy to fill with bleak assessments for how the health insurance market will quickly collapse in the wake of Republican defunding.

Right now, Democrats are effectively, but disingenuously, arguing that repeal without a replacement will lead to millions of people losing their insurance. Disingenuous because Republicans have never intended to repeal without a seamless transition to replacement. But the Democratic arguments just had gasoline poured on them by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) which today

estimated that repeal without replace would eventually add 32 million to the uninsured.

But Republicans have only themselves to blame for losing the messaging because they so far haven’t been able to fill the information vacuum with the detail for what they will do.

Don’t Republicans Now Need to Put a Detailed Bill on the Table In Order to Assure Voters?

No.

They need to detail a series of commitments complete with a timeline for how repeal, transition, and replace will look and how it will provide insurance security.

Vague Republican assurances that there will be an orderly transition and that people won’t lose their coverage whither in the face of all kinds of bad scenarios the Democrats are and will be coming up with. Republicans have now let the Democrats take what had been their worst domestic issue over the past six years and turn the tables on the Republicans. Bad start for Republicans.

The final bill will be the result of complex negotiations first inside the Republican caucus and then with Democrats. But people need to know the Republican bottom line. What is the minimum that consumers can expect and over what timeline?

Republicans are now looking at a strategy to introduce a series of piecemeal Obamacare replacements to be voted on in the near term – some under budget rules as they complete the next 2018 budget and some requiring 60 Senate votes – thereby forcing Democrats to vote against what could be popular alternatives one at a time. But even this strategy will hit snags – for example repealing Obamacare’s popular preexisting condition reform and replacing it with a lesser Republican “continuous coverage” provision that would require 60 Senate votes.



Medical Association of the State of Alabama Annual Meeting to feature Auburn University Coach Bruce Pearl and James B. McClintock, PhD

The Medical Association's 2017 Annual Session will be April 14-15 at the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel & Spa.

Delivering the Ellan McCrory, MD, Leadership Lecture will be Bruce Pearl, head men's basketball coach at Auburn University. During his 21-year career, Coach Pearl has guided his teams to the NCAA Tournament 17 times and the postseason 18 times. Under Pearl's leadership, Auburn sold out of season tickets for the first time in back-to-back seasons during his first two seasons at Auburn. He will speak at 2:45 p.m., Friday, April 14.

The Jerome Cochran, MD, Lecture will be presented by James B. McClintock, PhD. Funded for the past 25 years by the National Science Foundation, Dr. McClintock's research focuses on aspects of marine invertebrate nutrition, reproduction and primarily, Antarctic marine chemical ecology. He has published more than 250 scientific publications, edited and written books, made numerous scientific and popular science presentations. His research has been featured in a variety of media including the NPR Diane Rehm Show, NPR's "On Point" with Tom Ashbrook, The Weather Channel, CNN and *National Geographic Magazine*. He recently returned from his 14th research expedition to Antarctica where he and his research collaborators have become among the world's authorities on Antarctic marine chemical ecology/drug discovery. He will present *Drug Discovery in Antarctic Seas* during the morning session on Saturday, April 15.

Other topics include *Cannabis and Pain: Lessons from Colorado* and *Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA)*. Find links to registration and a full agenda online at www.alamedical.org/annualsession. Registration is free for members of the Medical Association.

Reserve a room by calling 877-545-0311 with room code MAS or [book online](#). Rates begin at \$140 per night. **The room block expires on March 16 at 5 p.m.**



American Academy of Neurology 2017 Annual Meeting

Make plans to join your colleagues at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center April 22-28, 2017, for the American Academy of Neurology's 69th Annual Conference. The meeting will offer an innovative learning environment for delivering the best education, science and networking opportunities.

Registration and hotel information are available at www.aan.com/view/AM17. Discounted room rates are available through March 8, 2017, or until the AAN room block is filled.

Early registration will close on March 30, 2017.

Understanding MACRA

www.alabamamedicine.org

The Medical Association and Warren Averett CPAs and Advisors in conjunction with several county medical societies will be hosting upcoming in-depth education sessions on MACRA. These educational opportunities are intended for physicians and staff to learn details regarding the new MACRA law and how it will affect your practices. The sessions will provide physicians with important information to help you be in compliance with new MACRA requirements so your practice can maximize your Medicare reimbursement potential and avoid penalties.

Houston County – March 9
Covington County – March 14
Jefferson County – March 16
Lee County – March 21
Montgomery County – April 18
Colbert County – April 20
Madison – April 25

Contact your county medical society for details.

AAN NEWS & NOTES

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AAN News & Notes is published quarterly. The articles are meant to provoke thought and comment and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the members, Board of Directors or staff of the Alabama Academy of Neurology. Comments and letters to the editor are welcome.



2017 STATEMENT

ONE STATEMENT PER MEMBER, PLEASE. Download additional forms at www.alneurology.com.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

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