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HEALTHCARE | ILLINOIS

LINES DRAWN IN PHARMA CLASH



JERRY NOWICKI, CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

A billboard truck urges lawmakers to “say no to 340B abuse” as it makes its rounds in the neighborhood surrounding the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield.

Disputed memo: Expanded drug discounts to cost millions

PETER HANCOCK
Capitol News Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — A proposal that would expand access to a federal program that discounts the price of prescription drugs could end up costing Illinois employers an additional \$89 million a year, including more than \$12 million a year for the state of Illinois itself.

That’s according to a memo, dated May 12, from the Department of Central Management Services, the state agency that administers the state employee health plan, to Rep. Travis Weaver, R-Edwards, who requested the information following a meeting of the legislative Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, or COGFA.

Capitol News Illinois obtained a copy of the memo through a third party. But groups representing healthcare organizations quickly disputed its findings.

The proposal, contained in a Senate amendment to House Bill 2371, is intended to give Federally Qualified Health Centers, Ryan White AIDS clinics, safety-net hospitals and other healthcare providers that serve large volumes of Medicaid patients greater access to what’s known as the 340B Drug Pricing Program.

What is the 340B program?

That’s a federal program, established in 1992, that requires drug manufacturers to provide drugs to those facilities at substantially discounted prices. Those facilities then mark the price back up when they dispense or prescribe the drugs to their patients. That spread between their acquisition cost and the price they charge becomes an indirect revenue stream that helps feed

their bottom line.

The bill pending in the General Assembly, which awaits a final vote in the House, would prohibit drug companies from restricting the ability of those hospitals and clinics to acquire those discounted drugs through contract pharmacies.

That’s something many clinics and safety-net hospitals say they’ve experienced in recent years, limiting their ability to acquire drugs at the discounted prices.

The bill would also prohibit drug manufacturers from requiring 340B-qualified hospitals and clinics to report ingredient cost or pricing data, to report how they manage inventory of 340B drugs or to submit any data or information not required by state or federal law as a condition of participating in the 340B program.

The bill has generated enormous lobbying campaigns on both sides of the issue, shedding light on the complexities of how prescription drugs are priced in the United States and how a seemingly small change in one area can have far-reaching unintended consequences.

During an April 14 COGFA hearing, Shawn Gremminger, president and CEO of the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, explained how the 340B program has grown beyond what anyone expected when it was created.

“It was a program designed to be so small, they didn’t bother giving it a name,” he said. “Literally, it’s called 340B because it just sits at section 340B of the Public Health Service Act.”

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Shawn Gremminger, president and CEO of the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions

CONGRESS

Why are so many lawmakers retiring?

Those leaving cite lack of order, low productivity

VALERIE YURK AND SAVANNAH BEHRMANN
CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — As more lawmakers than usual leave Congress, it begs the question: Is this a one-off spike or a larger sign of things to come?

Retirement announcements are a feature of any election year, but this goes beyond normal turnover, experts say. Bitterly partisan redistricting pushes around the country have created a state of constant uncertainty that only adds to the political polarization and low legislative productivity that’s plagued Capitol Hill.

To date, 36 House Republicans and 20 Democrats have said they won’t return to the chamber next year — either because they are running for another office or are giving up public service altogether — representing the largest number of retirements since the 1992 cycle, according to Brookings. That count doesn’t include members who died, resigned or lost their primary.

In the Senate, 11 senators are leaving the chamber, including seven Republicans and four Democrats.

The cohort represents a range of fresh-faced and seasoned lawmakers, but a few points stick out: Most of them are Republican, and of the House Republicans, over 85% hail from safe red districts, according to a Roll Call analysis.

Similarly, in the Senate, where experts see the GOP as having a stronger chance of keeping the majority come November, only a couple of Republicans in “purple” competitive states are leaving, while the rest are considered to be ruby red.

In other words, the data suggest that members are leaving for reasons other than regular midterm pressures, said Casey Burgat, legislative affairs program director and associate professor at George Washington University.

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WORLD

UAE reports drone strike; Trump again threatens Iran

TALA RAMADAN
Reuters

DUBAI — A drone strike caused a fire at a nuclear power plant in the United Arab Emirates, officials in Abu Dhabi said Sunday, at a time when progress appears to have stalled in efforts to end the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran and restart shipping in the Gulf.

Emirati officials said they were investigating the source of the strike and that the UAE had the full right to respond to such “terrorist attacks.” The UAE previously accused Iran of attacking its energy targets in what it has called an escalation of the conflict in the region.

Also on Sunday, President Donald Trump threatened consequences for Iran if its leaders do not act quickly.

“For Iran, the Clock is Ticking, and they better get moving, FAST, or there won’t be anything left of them. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!,” he wrote in a Truth Social post.

The drone hit an electrical generator outside the inner perimeter of the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant, the Abu Dhabi Media Office said. Radiological safety levels were unaffected and there were no injuries, it said.

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