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Congressional leaders are considering rolling back drugmaker discounts to Medicare beneficiaries with high prescription costs. It is unclear if the Medicare rollback will make the final legislation.

Groups say Medicare discounts threatened in opioids bill

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer and health care groups are scrambling to block what they say is a move by the pharmaceutical industry to commandeer must-pass opioids epidemic legislation as a vehicle for rolling back drugmaker discounts to Medicare beneficiaries with high prescription costs.

Republicans said Friday nothing has been decided in behind-the-scenes discussions. But Henry Connelly, a spokesman for House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, called the effort a “Republican attempt to hijack a bipartisan effort on opioids funding to ram through a multibillion-dollar handout to Big Pharma.”

The House and Senate are working on major legislation to combat the opioids epidemic by focusing on treatment, recovery, prevention and law enforcement.

The latest House version is expected to be unveiled early

next week.

Because the bill is considered must-pass, lobbyists and lawmakers are trying to attach their priority proposals.

Details of the potential Medicare component were shifting, but basically it would partially roll back a 70 percent discount that Congress recently required drugmakers to provide to seniors in Medicare’s “doughnut hole” coverage gap. Backers of the rollback say lawmakers set that percentage too high, relying on an initial savings estimate that was later changed by the Congressional Budget Office.

Such nuances seemed to be getting lost in the building outcry against the deal, joined Friday by AARP.

“AARP strongly opposes ... attempts to cut a backroom deal with Congress and reverse the Medicare Part D doughnut hole improvements enacted earlier this year that put drugmakers on the hook for a higher share of Medicare drug costs,” vice president Nancy LeaMond said in a statement. Coalitions including

patient advocacy groups, insurers, hospitals, doctors and pharmacies were also pushing back.

It remained unclear if the Medicare rollback would make the final legislation. Polls show that health care is a major issue with voters in the midterm elections, and prescription drug costs consistently rank as the top concern.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly vowed to bring down drug costs.

If Republicans enact a bill that can be labeled a cost shift to seniors weeks before an election, they could well be handing Democrats a political gift.

“The focus is on passing an opioids bill that helps address this epidemic and we intend to do that,” said Zach Hunter, a spokesman for Republicans on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which oversees drug policy.

The industry trade group Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America has criticized the 70 percent discounts mandated by Congress

as a giveaway to insurers. The powerful lobbying group was caught off guard when Congress included the discount earlier this year in a massive budget bill. Drugmakers had already been providing a 50-percent price break.

Other prescription drug proposals in the mix as lawmakers continue to work on final legislation are a couple of measures may appeal to Democrats. One is the CREATES Act, which promotes competition from lower-priced generic drugs. Another would tackle a separate glitch in the Medicare prescription drug benefit, which if left unaddressed would raise costs for seniors starting in 2020.

The Medicare doughnut hole coverage gap begins when a patient reaches \$3,750 in drug costs.

Also among the groups trying to block the Medicare rollback are Patients for Affordable Drugs and the Campaign for Sustainable Rx Pricing, which includes a broad range of health care industry organizations.

UN: Excessive drinking killed over 3 million people in 2016

GENEVA (AP) — Drinking too much alcohol killed more than 3 million people in 2016, mostly men, the World Health Organization said.

The U.N. health agency also warned that current policy responses are not sufficient to reverse trends predicting an increase in consumption over the next 10 years.

In a new report Friday, the WHO said that about 237 million men and 46 million women faced alcohol problems, with the highest prevalence in Europe and the Americas. Europe has the highest global per capita alcohol consumption, even though it has already dropped by 10 percent since 2010.

Around a third of alcohol-related deaths were a result of injuries, including car crashes and self-harm, while about one in five were due to either digestive disorders or cardiovascular diseases. Cancers, infectious diseases, mental disorders and other health conditions were also to blame.

“Far too many people, their families and communities suffer the consequences of the harmful use of alcohol through violence, injuries, mental health problems and diseases like cancer and stroke,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of WHO. “It’s time to step up action to prevent this serious threat to the development of healthy societies.”

The average daily consumption of alcohol by people who consume it is about two glasses of wine, a large bottle of beer or two shots of spirits.

Globally, about 2.3 billion people are current drinkers.

The report, the third in a series after ones in 2010 and 2014, relies on information from 2016 — the latest data available. WHO said the trends and projections point to an expected increase in global alcohol per capita consumption over the next decade, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Americas.

“The policy responses which are currently in place in countries are definitely not sufficient to reverse the trends, which we observe in several parts of the world, or to improve significantly this situation,” Dr. Vladimir Poznyak, coordinator of WHO’s management of substance abuse unit, told reporters.

“When we look at the trends of alcohol consumption in many countries from 2000, you can see ups and downs — which are determined by different factors,” said Poznyak, citing countries’ levels of social development, economic backdrops, policy measures and cultural trends.

He said the data showed, for example, that alcohol consumption tends to drop in countries facing economic crisis.

Poznyak said it was “imperative for the governments to put in place measures that can mitigate the harms associated with this increase.”

The Distilled Spirits Council, which advocates for the industry in the U.S., said in a statement it supports the WHO’s goal to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.

Score! Scrabble dictionary adds ‘OK,’ ‘ew’ to official play

NEW YORK (AP) — Scrabble players, time to rethink your game because 300 new

words are coming your way, including some long-awaited gems: OK and ew, to name a few.

Merriam-Webster released the sixth edition of “The Official Scrabble Players Dictionary” on

Monday, four years after the last freshening up. The company, at the behest of Scrabble owner Hasbro Inc., left out one possibility under consideration for a hot minute — RBI — after consulting competitive players who thought it potentially too contentious. There was a remote case to be made since RBI has morphed into an actual word, pronounced rib-ee.

But that’s OK because, “OK.”

“OK is something Scrabble players have been waiting for, for a long time,” said lexicographer Peter Sokolowski, editor at large at Merriam-Webster. “Basically two- and three-letter words are the lifeblood of the game.”

There’s more good news in qapik, adding to an arsenal of 20 playable words beginning with q that don’t need a u. Not that Scrabblers care all that much about definitions, qapik is a unit of currency in Azerbaijan. “Every time there’s a

word with q and no u, it’s a big deal,” Sokolowski said. “Most of these are obscure.”

There are some sweet scorers now eligible for play, including bizjet, and some magical vowel dumps, such as arancini, those Italian balls of cooked rice. Bizjet, meaning — yes — a small plane used for business, would be worth a whopping 120 points on an opening play, but only if it’s made into a plural with an s. That’s due to the 50-point bonus for using all seven tiles and the double word bonus space usually played at the start.

SENIOR HAPPENINGS

- Overwhelmed with stuff? Learn tips on how to downsize and what to consider keeping or purging at a free community presentation “Downsizing Your Stuff,” in The Hub café at 211 Smith St. on Oct. 2 from 5:30-7 p.m. The event is open to all ages.
- The Jeans and Queens Square Dance group will offer dance lessons every Tuesday night through the winter. You need not have a partner and can come when you can. There

is a \$5 suggested contribution nightly to cover the efforts of the caller (George Baker). Bring a snack if you wish and be prepared to have lots of laughs. Enter through the north doors. The first lesson will take place Sept 25 from 7-9 p.m.

- Newly retired John Gilmore says, “(My retirement project) in 2018 is traveling the United States, (making at least one stop) at all 48 states, to view as many federally subsidized

housing communities (Section 8) as possible, for seniors and/or persons with disabilities. My primary goal is to provide an hour of live music and memory-rich entertainment.”

Gilmore chose The Hub on Smith in Sheridan for his stop in Wyoming.

He will present classic country tunes with guitar and memories through slide show Sept. 27 at 1:30 p.m.

The event is free and open to the public.



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Entrees and kiosk include sides, dessert and drink.

ENTRÉE CHOICE* or SOUP/SALAD

Tue- Pork Chop w/ Peach Sauce
Wed- Chicken & Vegetable Stir Fry
Thurs- Lasagna
Fri- Braised Beef Tips
Sat- Spinach & Ham Quiche
Sun - Chicken Fried Steak
Mon- Braised Pork Ribs/Black Eyed Peas & Collard Greens

***entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals**

SALAD BAR AVAILABLE
Mondays - Fridays

No Salad Bar on Saturday or Sunday

Tue- Beginners Square Dance	7:00 p.m.	Fitness Room
Wed- Pool Tournament	9:00 a.m.	Billiards Room
Thurs John Gilmore Music & Memories	1:30 p.m.	Café
Fri - Dominoes	9:30 a.m.	Café
Sat- Texas Hold'em	12:30 p.m.	Café
Mon- Chair Massage	12:00 p.m. to 2 p.m.	Lobby

Lunch Service Hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street
Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

Help at Home Services, 675-1978. 232 North Brooks: Mondays - Fridays.

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